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BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING FAMILY HISTORY MAGAZINE

ISSUE 237 DECEMBER 2025 £5.99

# WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?®

SENT TO AUSTRALIA
VIEW CONVICT KIN

## BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO FAMILY TREES

We take a deep dive into the best software options to support your family research

## DOGS OF WAR

The vital role animals played during WW2

## Wills and a DNA test finally smashed my Welsh brick wall

## HOLLYWOOD LIVES

Uncovering the secret story of Sherlock Holmes' landlady

## BACK TO SCHOOL

How to find old registers online

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- Discover Suffolk gaol books
- Resources for south-west Scotland
- FREE app to organise family photos

# DISCOVER THE WHOLE PICTURE

When you explore your family tree, you find names, dates and places. But it's the extra details that truly reveal your family story.

Ancestry has a huge range of historical records, and with an average of two million added every day, there's always more to discover. So even when you think you know your family, they can keep surprising you.

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# Welcome

## Sarah's Top Tip

**Sign up to our email newsletter so you don't miss out on any special offers**

A couple of months ago, we ran a story in the magazine about a free download of a surname dictionary. It had proved popular with our newsletter readers, and we wanted to share it more widely. Unfortunately, just before we went on sale, the offer stopped. These things happen, but it did make me think that some of our readers who don't receive our weekly newsletter might be missing out. For example, we know genealogy providers will offer a number of discounts and free-access deals in November that we will be flagging up via our newsletter (see **page 34**). Don't miss out!

Where do you keep your primary family tree? I say "primary" because, if you are like me, you'll have a few versions scattered around, picking up hints. I used to keep my tree on Family Tree Maker, but I ended up migrating over to Ancestry because it felt easier for me (and I love the Ancestry app). However, I know a lot of readers prefer to use software and Chris Paton's article on **page 14** helpfully looks at all of the pros and cons. I'd love to hear where our readers like to keep their family tree.

I've been a big fan of old movies since I was young (they were the best thing on TV in the 1970s), so I was fascinated when Alison Kerr got in touch to talk about her Hollywood relative (**page 18**). I particularly liked the fact that the records told a different story about Mary Gordon than the film studios wanted to portray.

I also enjoyed Neil Storey's article about the role that animals played during the Second World War (**page 56**). In fact, I loved the opening image so much, it made it to the cover. We often associate Remembrance Sunday with the First World War, and if you have a relation who fought in a Pals Battalion then you won't want to miss the new Findmypast project mentioned on **page 11**. However, the Second World War also had a big impact on our families (and their pets), and we should remember that as well. Enjoy the issue.

Sarah

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## Contributors

### Chris Paton
Chris is a genealogist and author (**scottishgenes.blogspot.com**). A frequent contributor, this month he shares his expert advice for building a digital family tree (**page 14**).

### Alison Kerr
A writer, critic and broadcaster, Alison reveals how she used all her research skills to uncover the story of a Glaswegian relative who found success in Hollywood on **page 18**.

### Nicola Johnson
Nicola is a genealogist whose 3x great grandfather was sent to Australia. So she was the perfect writer for this month's 'Focus On' about transportation records (**page 28**).

COVER IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES/ARP RESCUE WORKERS WITH A SMALL DOG DURING THE BLITZ, 11 SEPTEMBER 1940

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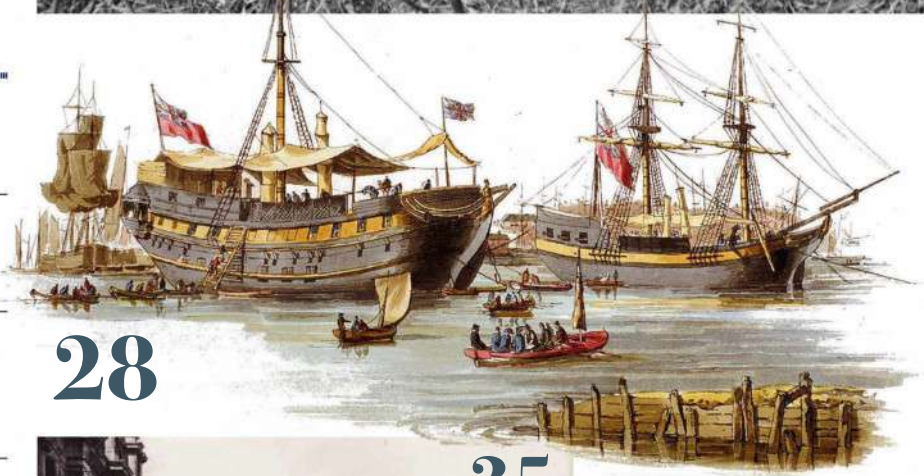

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CONJUROR'S DEATH.

WEARIED BY BAD TIMES AND DEBT, HE COMMITS SUICIDE.

"As soon as I get a bit of money from my conjuring I have to pay it away in rates and taxes," remarked William Smith, otherwise "Carl Lebert," a professional conjuror, of Gray's-inn-rd., to a friend.

He appeared very depressed, and later retired to his room. His wife next heard a noise as though someone had fallen, but she took no notice, thinking that he was trying some new trick.

When the servant went to the room she found Smith with his throat cut. At the inquest on Saturday it was explained that deceased had some bills, about £50 or £60, to meet, and could not meet them. He was an honorable man, always wanting to pay his way, and the inability to do so preyed him.

In the room in which the suicide took place Lebert had all his [illegible] and appliances spread [illegible]

"Suicide during temporary [illegible]" was the verdict of the jury.

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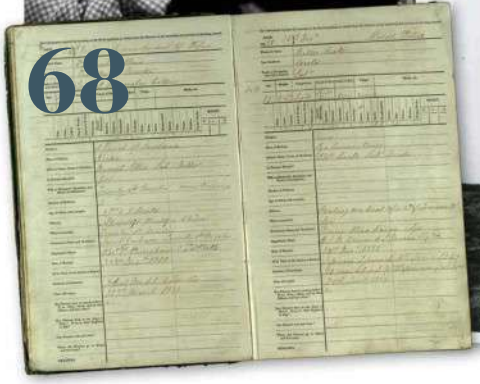
GETTY IMAGES



GETTY IMAGES | SUFFOLK ARCHIVES

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# Letters

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**Write to** *WDYTYA? Magazine*, Eagle House, Bristol BS1 4ST

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## Railway Tragedy

STAR LETTER

Further to Dr Mike Esbester's article "The Reign of the Railway" in the October issue, may I add another angle to the fascinating story of our railways and what they can tell us about family history – that of passengers hurt or killed in accidents.

An early victim, sadly, was my wife's 3x great grandfather's sister, Fanny Gosling, "killed by an accident on the railway in a most awful and sudden manner" as her gravestone from 1845 puts it. The British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**) was invaluable in uncovering the full story. Local newspapers reported both the accident itself and the subsequent inquest in great detail, giving us priceless insights into Fanny's life – and her death.

She was 21 (later reports said "22"; then, as now, newspapers cannot be relied on to be wholly accurate), and in service to William Shackleford and his family, a coach-builder in Oxford. The day of the accident was a Monday, so probably Fanny's day off, and she was no doubt thrilled to have the convenience of railway travel so she could get home so easily to Clifton Hampden, a lovely village on the Thames.

Instead of going straight to see her mother after reaching Abingdon Road Station (now Culham), Fanny waited for her own train to leave then started to cross over the line behind it, in order to see some friends first, witnesses presumed. Very sadly, however, she failed to see or hear the fast train coming in the other direction. She was killed instantly.

Five days after the accident the Oxford coroner, William Brunner, held his inquest at the Railway Hotel by the station, and the local papers recorded the witnesses' evidence in full.

A porter, Richard Lowe, saw Fanny start to cross the line: "I called to her to stop, as I saw the express train coming… She was instantly dragged under the engine to the end of the down platform nearest Oxford… I have seen the deceased several times before today at this station. I knew her name was Fanny Gosling and that her friends lived at Clifton."

The train driver, William Lawrence, explained how he was going "at the rate of between 30 and 40 miles an hour" and first saw Fanny "three or four yards" in front of him as he rounded the curve before reaching the station. When he brought his train to a stop he found "a bonnet and a black shawl" on his engine.

The inquest also heard that when her body was examined "a watch, still going, was found in the poor girl's bosom". How interesting that a young servant girl in 1845 had a watch. It is well known that the coming of the railways regularised timekeeping in Britain; here's evidence that even very ordinary people like Fanny now needed to know the time so as not to miss their train.

The coroner was energetic in following up what he found on the day of the accident. He had seen that the accident could have been prevented if there had been a fence on the station platform, and if staff had instructions to stop people crossing the line when a train was due.

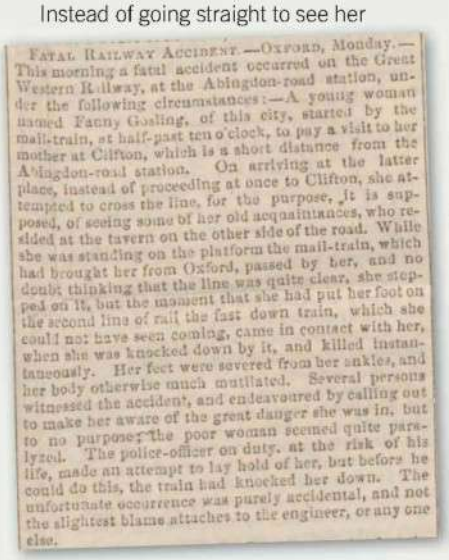
By the time he reconvened his inquest just five days after the accident the coroner had not only written to the directors of the Great Western Railway, asking them to fence off the platform, he had also personally delivered his letter to them in Paddington – and got GWR's reply, agreeing to his request. Fast work all round.

Rather poignantly, all three of Fanny's sisters later named their eldest daughter Fanny, as did my wife's ancestor, her brother John. And someone, perhaps her employer, paid for this fine headstone, without which we wouldn't know her story.

I have written this all up, and attached it to Fanny's profile in the Kirby/Szweda family tree on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**).

**Iain Mackinnon, by email**

Iain took this photograph of Fanny Gosling's gravestone, which mentions that she was "killed by an accident on the railway"



FATAL RAILWAY ACCIDENT.—OXFORD, Monday.—This morning a fatal accident occurred on the Great Western Railway, at the Abingdon-road station, under the following circumstances:—A young woman named Fanny Gosling, of this city, started by the mail-train, at half-past ten o'clock, to pay a visit to her mother at Clifton, which is a short distance from the Abingdon-road station. On arriving at the latter place, instead of proceeding at once to Clifton, she attempted to cross the line, for the purpose, it is supposed, of seeing some of her old acquaintances, who resided at the tavern on the other side of the road. While she was standing on the platform the mail-train, which had brought her from Oxford, passed by her, and no doubt thinking that the line was quite clear, she stepped on it, but the moment that she had put her foot on the second line of rail the fast down train, which she could not have seen coming, came in contact with her, when she was knocked down by it, and killed instantaneously. Her feet were severed from her ankles, and her body otherwise much mutilated. Several persons witnessed the accident, and endeavoured by calling out to make her aware of the great danger she was in, but to no purpose; the poor woman seemed quite paralyzed. The police-officer on duty, at the risk of his life, made an attempt to lay hold of her, but before he could do this, the train had knocked her down. The unfortunate occurrence was purely accidental, and not the slightest blame attaches to the engineer, or any one else.

One of the articles about the accident that Iain discovered in the British Newspaper Archive

**Editor Replies** **Thank you for sharing Fanny's story Iain. Her death clearly affected the family profoundly. Here's hoping further lives were saved by the coroner's actions.**

## Nurses In The Family

In each issue I find at least one article that is directly relevant to my research or interests, as well as all the hints and tips from your writers and readers.

In September's edition I had a double bonus. First was the 'Focus On' article about the Channel Islands, which reminded me of a visit to Sark when a teenager as a young assistant scout leader.

Then the 'Gem From the Archive' was about Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses in the First World War. My mother gave me some family photos in the early 1980s, including one of my three great aunts who had all served. Dorothy (known as Dorrie) and Elizabeth Maud (known as Maud) still lived at home with their parents in Twickenham. Great Aunt May had married Arthur Edward Baylis who owned two chemists' shops in Great Malvern and Barnards Green, Worcestershire. I found their record cards thanks to an item in the magazine years ago.

**Richard West, by email**

Richard's three great aunts, photographed while working as nurses in the Voluntary Aid Detachment

Editor Replies **What a great photo (and helpfully labelled!).**

## Locating Burials

In response to Antony David Davies' letter in the September issue regarding saving burial registers and suggesting a central archive, while he may be referring to churchyards, I have found council cemeteries also have different methods. My experience of two of my local councils has been nothing but brilliant. Manchester City and Tameside registers are both free to use, and you can see who else is buried in the plot.

Recently though, I've had to extend my research to adjoining Greater Manchester boroughs – Stockport and Bolton – and these have opted to use Deceased Online (**deceasedonline.com**) to make their registers public.

This is the first time I'd used Deceased Online, even though I've got over 4,000 relatives in my tree and do like to see where they are commemorated. I was surprised and annoyed to find that you have to pay to find even the location of a grave. This will surely dissuade the casual researcher from going and visiting a relative's grave. I think councils should encourage people to visit cemeteries to see their family graves. I do understand that Deceased Online also has the documentation to go along with the grave, but I imagine not many people want this level of detail.

On a related issue, while I was researching family burials in Stockport I found a photo on Find a Grave (**findagrave.com**) with latitude and longitude included. This saved me a lot of time, as the grave was in long grass. In future I will add the GPS position to photos I take for the site!

**David Sinnett, by email**

Editor Replies **I can see how cash-strapped councils are tempted by the service offered by Deceased Online, but I agree with you: most people won't pay for this sort of information. Adding GPS to gravestone photographs is a great idea.**

**Chris Baker @fourteeneighteen.co.uk commented on Ancestry's appeal over NRS records (page 10)**
I'm no fan of the Scotland's People website but this ruling is just appalling. #genealogy

## My Search Tips

After reading the 'Big Question' in the March issue, I thought I might share my experiences in a couple of difficult searches that I have carried out myself.

Your expert Steve Thomas advised Derek Murphy that searching for an ancestor's baptism under his English name would not succeed, because the person in question was a Catholic and records for the Roman Catholic Church are in Latin.

However, I find that if you tick the box that allows for spelling variations in a Christian name, the search engine will bring the correct person up even in Latin – it certainly happened for me when I was searching for my children's great great grandfather.

I also had difficulty in tracing where a great aunt of mine was in the 1911 census. She had been orphaned, and was known by several different names. So, instead of including her exact name, place and date of birth, I broadened it all. Up came a long list of options including the child in question, with her names spelled wrongly, her date of birth over a year out, and living with complete strangers miles away from where I had thought she would be.

It has been said before, but the thing to remember is that sometimes those giving out information do not know the correct details. Even children registering the death of a parent can sometimes get it wrong.

There are also modern transcription errors. I found a reference to a child being born "top of the coals" and assumed that, since the family were canal-barge owners, the child was born on one of their boats – only to find out later that it was actually a place name!

**Janet Hall, by email**

Editor Replies **Thank you for sharing your search tips Janet!**

## A Father's Service

I was very interested to read Felicity Day's article "Service and Sacrifice" in the September issue, as my father was in service in the early 1930s. Much of the information in the article rang a bell – the austerity, the camaraderie and the benefits. I can recall my father recounting many tales of his time in service covering these aspects of his life.

My father was born in Rushden, Northamptonshire, and like most of his contemporaries joined the ▶

boot and shoe industry when he left school. However, after four years he was made redundant and through the good offices of the local vicar managed to secure a post in service. My father always said that being made redundant was the best thing that ever happened to him, as until then he could see himself working in a factory for the rest of his life.

I have many of his letters of reference including one from the agent at Eastwell Park, Kent, recommending him to a Mrs Gaullt of Eaton Square, London, as a single-handed footman, which interestingly mentions that as he was not six feet tall he would not be able to progress to first or second footman.

Further correspondence shows that he was also at Compton Castle in Somerset.

His 'big break' was when he became valet to Lord Inchcape. It was during his time there that he received one of the benefits mentioned in the article – a trip to Singapore from November 1932 to February 1933.

My father wrote a very interesting journal, which I still have, detailing this trip. Apparently, Lord Inchcape was going to visit his tea plantations in India. My father travelled with Lord Inchcape's butler, and his journal states that he had little to do once on board ship as Lord Inchcape was looked after by the crew. It seems his tasks were mainly to make sure that the correct clothes were laid out at the right time. The journal details travel across France by train before picking up the P&O vessel in Marseille.

After an interlude in Egypt visiting Cairo and the pyramids they sailed on through the Suez Canal to Bombay (now Mumbai) before crossing India by train to Calcutta. It was here that Lord Inchcape told my father that he would not be needed during his visit to the tea plantations, and offered him the option to travel on one of the P&O ships to Singapore and back. As you can imagine, my father jumped at the chance.

Following that employment he became butler at Thorpe Malsor Hall in Northamptonshire so that he could be nearer home, as his father was ill. He eventually left service in 1936 to marry.

**David Parker, Portsmouth**

David sent us this wonderful photograph of his father by email

Editor Replies **What an amazing experience for a young man of that time. Working in service clearly wasn't all bad!**

## More AI Errors

I can only concur with Alan Futter's letter in the October issue about the risk of using AI tools.

While researching an industrial accident, I was looking for a photo of the Holmes Tail Goit, a water channel built as part of the Rotherham works of ironmaster Samuel Walker. I searched for the goit using Microsoft Copilot, which supplied an up-to-date photo of the works plus one of Rotherham Parish Church. Unfortunately, the accompanying text said that it was in Huddersfield!

Samuel Walker was a genius, but I don't think even he had the ability to draw his water from the River Colne nearly 20 miles away. Copilot also compounded its error moving one of the victims' addresses from close to the Walker works to Doncaster.

**Peter Feek, Rotherham**

Editor Replies **Thanks Peter. As family historians we need to apply the same rigorous checks to AI-generated information that we would to all our research.**

**YOUR LETTER IN PRINT** We reserve the right to edit any letters sent to the magazine. Messages posted to our Facebook wall and tweets sent to us may also appear in print. The choice of Star Letter is the editor's and the prize is subject to change.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# What's On

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## PICK OF THE MONTH

Discover parish records with this Society of Genealogists course

### Diving Into The Parish And Its Records

**7 November**
w **portal.sog.org.uk/Event/view/1395115**

In this four-week online course Else Churchill, the genealogist at the Society of Genealogists, will cover topics including the origins of parish registers and other parish records, how to get the most out of them, the parish's role in administering Poor Laws, the roles of parish officers, and how digitisation and AI are improving access. The course will also feature family tree reconstruction and the Friends, Associates and Neighbours (FAN) method, helping you understand how parish records can reveal not just your relations, but the wider networks that shaped their lives. £79.20 for members of the Society of Genealogists, otherwise £99.

Else Churchill shares her advice

## IN PERSON

### To Force The Enemy Off The Sea

**6 November**
a International Bomber Command Centre, Lincoln
t 01522 514755
w **tinyurl.com/ibcc-force**
Find out about the vital role that RAF Coastal Command's Strike Wings played in attacking Germany's marine supply lines with this lecture from David Boyd and John Vimpany. £15.25.

### Mud, Blood & Bandages: Medical Services WW1

**7 November**
a St Mary's Church Hall, Bedford
e *secretary@bfhs.org.uk*
w **www.bfhs.org.uk/talks.html**
Ian Langworthy will explain how injured soldiers were treated during the First World War. Free to members of Bedfordshire Family History Society, small charge for non-members.

### Surrey Family History Fair

**8 November**
a Woking Leisure Centre
w **wsfhs.co.uk**
Organised by West Surrey Family History Society, this event provides researchers with the opportunity to see exhibits, get expert advice and meet representatives of various local and family history societies. Free.

### The Forgotten Voices Of The Accused

**8 November**
a Maryhill Burgh Halls, Glasgow
w **tinyurl.com/skiddle-accused**
This conference from the charity Remembering the Accused Witches of Scotland (RAWS) will explore witch trials in the country. £25 plus a £2.75 booking fee.

### Gratitude In Glass: War Memorial Windows By Clokey Of Belfast

**12 November**
a Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast
t 028 9053 4800
w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-grat**
Nigel Henderson reveals what memorial windows tell us about Ulster's wartime casualties. Free.

### Introduction To Poor Law Records

**14 November**
a The Hold, Ipswich
t 01473 296666
w **tinyurl.com/ticketsource-pl**
Discover what Poor Law records show about Suffolk's history with this Suffolk Archives talk. £15.

### My Two Husbands And The Effect Of War On Young Men

**17 November**
a Fromus Centre, Saxmundham
e *events@avsfhg.org.uk*
w **avsfhg.org.uk/events/our-talks/**
At this Alde Valley Suffolk Family History Group event, 103-year-old Manette Bailie will discuss her Second World War experiences and those of her husbands. £1 for group members, otherwise £3.

### Sons Of The Soil

**18 November**
a Nursteed Centre, Devizes
t 01380 723191
w **wiltshirefhs.co.uk/devizes-branch**
In this Wiltshire Family History Society talk Janet Few shares tips for researching 'ag labs'. Free.

## IN PERSON & ONLINE

### Battlefields That Shaped English History

**14 November**
a National Army Museum, London
t 020 7730 0717
w **tinyurl.com/nam-battlefields**
Michael Rayner reveals what modern landscapes, written sources and archaeology tell us about England's battlefields. Free.

## ONLINE

### Pharos Tutors

**Various dates**
w **pharostutors.com**
Upcoming online courses include 'Nonconformity – Its Records and History 1600–1950' with Alec Tritton (four weeks from 6 November) and 'Education and Childhood 1820 to 1920' with Linda Newey (four weeks from 10 November). Various prices.

### Navigating The Maps Website

**5 November**
w **nls.uk/whats-on/navigating-the-maps-website/**
Learn how to make the most of the old maps on the National Library of Scotland's site. Free.

### Writing Up Your Family History Workshop

**15 November**
w **tinyurl.com/berksfhs-writing**
Dr Barry Jerome explains how to turn research into an engaging story. £10, or £9 for members of Berkshire Family History Society.

### Our Policing Past

**21 November**
w **swheritage.org.uk/events/coffee-time-talk-policing-past/**
This talk from the South West Heritage Trust features experts from the Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall. £5.

## BOOK AHEAD

This talk will explore what 'home' meant to our ancestors

### At Home In History – Reflections On Writing The History Of Domestic Life

**10 December**
w **tinyurl.com/surrey-cc-at-home-in-history**
The homes we live in exert a powerful influence, shaping our behaviour, relationships and values. In this online talk from Surrey Heritage, Prof. Jane Hamlett discusses how the home has become an important category for understanding the past. £6.

# News

**Rosemary Collins** reports on the latest data releases and genealogy news

# Ancestry wins appeal over access to Scottish records

**Ancestry (ancestry.co.uk) has scored a partial victory in a long-running legal battle to publish family history records that are preserved by National Records of Scotland (NRS; nrscotland.gov.uk).**

On 11 September, Scotland's General Regulatory Chamber decided that NRS did not have the right to refuse a request by Ancestry, the largest commercial family history website in the world, to access its records under Freedom of Information law.

In October 2022, Ancestry requested digital images and digital indices of the following records held by NRS:

- 1841–1911 Scottish census records;
- Scottish civil birth (1855–1921), marriage (1855–1946) and death (1855–1971) records;
- Scottish parish baptism, marriage and burial records (1538–1854);
- Low churches' and dissenters' parish baptism (1746–1921), marriage (1746–1946) and burial (1746–1971) records;
- 1855–1940 valuation rolls;
- 1513–1925 wills and testaments, and 1857–1965 soldiers' wills;
- 1867–79 prison registers;
- Photographs: images taken from medieval documents and photos (18th and 19th century)
- Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland: Coats of Arms (1672–1921); and
- 1916–1918 military tribunal records.

One of the birth records preserved by NRS that are also available to download from Scotland's People

HM General Register House in Edinburgh, the home of National Records of Scotland

Many of these records are currently exclusively available on Scotland's People (**scotlandspeople.gov.uk**), NRS's family history site, where researchers can download them for a small fee.

In December 2022, NRS refused the request. In May 2023, Ancestry complained to NRS about the refusal and also submitted an additional request for the 1921 Scottish census records, now also available on Scotland's People.

The NRS then rejected Ancestry's complaint. Ancestry complained to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which upheld NRS's decision to refuse access to the records.

In January 2025, Ancestry appealed against the ICO's decision in a hearing at the General Regulatory Chamber.

At the appeal, Quinton Atkinson, the firm's senior director of global content acquisition, agreed that the records were "a valuable resource" that Ancestry wished to "exploit… commercially".

He added that the firm had obtained records from 300 archives in Europe, over half of which had received payment in some form, and that Ancestry would be open to paying fees to NRS.

Linda Sinclair, director of corporate services and accountable officer at NRS, said that it would take NRS 12–18 months to put in place Ancestry's request and cost over £560,000, which would have a "catastrophic" effect on NRS's financial sustainability.

The General Regulatory Chamber partially upheld Ancestry's appeal, ruling that producing the requested records was within NRS's public task.

However, it added it did not have jurisdiction to determine whether NRS's exercise of its discretion to refuse Ancestry's request was unlawful, and a decision on whether the records could be released would need to be the subject of a separate hearing.

In response to the judgment an Ancestry spokesperson said, "We are reviewing the tribunal's ruling carefully and will determine our next steps in due course." However, a spokesperson for NRS simply stated, "It is inappropriate to comment on live litigation."

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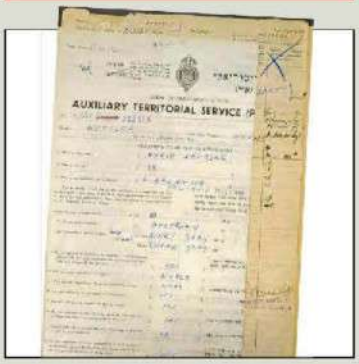
## NEWS IN BRIEF




One of the records indexed on Discovery

### Records of the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service added to Discovery

The National Archives (TNA) at Kew has indexed 4,500 records of the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) from the Second World War on its catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**), after they were transferred from the Ministry of Defence. They include records of the Palestine ATS (catalogued in WO 447) and the Overseas Clearing Wing (WO 459). The records include each woman's military number, age, marital status, religion and main military unit, as well as their dates of enlistment and discharge.

A mock-up of the new museum

### Work starts on new Derry/Londonderry museum

Construction work has begun on a new museum exploring the history and culture of Derry/Londonderry in Northern Ireland and its connection to the North Atlantic. The Derry–Londonderry on the North Atlantic (DNA) Museum (**dnamuseum.com**) is due to open in spring 2027 in the historic Star Fort at Ebrington. The £14.4 million project has received support from Derry City & Strabane District Council and the Northern Irish government, in addition to £3.5 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

A double-page spread from the survey

# New digitisation project will put 'Tudor Domesday Book' online

**A survey of 16th-century England and Wales compared to the Domesday Book is to be published for free online.**

*Valor Ecclesiasticus* was carried out in 1535, ahead of the dissolution of the monasteries. Henry VIII commissioned the survey so that his government could assess the wealth of England's churches, which the king controlled following the secession from the Church of Rome.

*Valor Ecclesiasticus* counted 8,000 parish churches, 650 monasteries, 22 cathedrals and other buildings. It took note of the property they owned and even recorded the names of many of the men and women who lived and worked there, together with the children, elderly and sick that they cared for.

For a long time, the only publicly available copies of the survey were flawed printed Latin translations. However, early drafts have now been found in private libraries, in addition to the official copies at The National Archives (TNA) at Kew.

'Rediscovering the Tudor Domesday' is a new three-year project that will publish the records on a free website, linked to modern maps of the locations.

The partnership between the University of Exeter, the University of Nottingham and the University of Reading, TNA and the National Trust will also involve local schools, heritage organisations, regional archives and community groups.

You can find out more about the survey at **tinyurl.com/tna-valor**.

## CAN YOU HELP?

Friends join up on 20 September 1914

Family history website Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) has launched a campaign to create a memorial roll recording members of the Pals Battalions – groups of friends, neighbours or workmates who joined the British Army together during the First World War. Many Pals Battalions suffered heavy casualties. Jen Baldwin, research specialist at Findmypast, said, "We believe that uncovering and understanding the stories of all those who served is a powerful act of remembrance. This year, we're encouraging our genealogy community to help shed light on one of the darkest wartime chapters: the Pals regiments of the First World War." If you have any information about a Pal, please visit **findmypast.co.uk/pals**. To help the research, the site is offering free access to millions of military records on 7–9 November.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES | NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND/CINEMATIC SKY | UNIVERSITY OF EXETER | GETTY IMAGES

# Welsh Women's Peace Petition exhibition opens

**The National Library of Wales (NLW; library.wales) in Aberystwyth has opened a permanent exhibition about a landmark peace petition.**

In 1923–1924, 390,296 Welsh women – one third of the women in Wales – signed a petition calling on the US government to join the League of Nations, the forerunner to the United Nations. In 2023, the Smithsonian Institution in the USA gifted it to the library.

The new exhibition, 'Peacemakers', includes a copy of the petition and the oak chest it was transported in. The pages of the petition will be shown alongside the accounts of the women who signed it.

Rhodri Llwyd Morgan, NLW's chief executive *(pictured above at far right)*, said, "The petition's story, and that of the women behind it, remained hidden for too long – but not any more. Now, this dedicated exhibition space means that their story is told, and that the resilience of these women will be remembered for generations to come."

You can search transcribed names and addresses from the petition via the free database at **peacepetition.library.wales**.

## Oldham Archives reopens after move

Oldham Archives (**hla.oldham.gov.uk/oldham-archives/**) has moved to a new home in Spindles Town Square Shopping Centre. The archive facility was opened by the town's mayor Councillor Eddie Moores on 27 September – Nostalgic Oldham Day. Councillor Peter Dean, cabinet member for culture and leisure, commented, "The move to the Spindles will hopefully allow even more of our residents to explore the collections and discover the many ways Oldham's history connects to their own lives." The facility is open Monday to Friday 10am–5pm, and 10am–1pm on Saturday.

Archivist Jan Hicks and Councillor Eddie Moores

**3**
The number of cousins reunited by chance when they met at their 3x great grandfather's Northamptonshire grave (**tinyurl.com/my-lond-3**)

**Henry Purcell**
An unknown song by the 17th-century composer has been found in a Worcestershire archive (**tinyurl.com/guard-purc**)

**16,266**
The number of cards sent to Second World War veteran Dougie Shelley on his 100th birthday (**tinyurl.com/wales-online-dougie/**)

**3 billion**
The number of base pairs of nucleotides that will be read by MyHeritage's new genome-sequencing DNA test (**tinyurl.com/wdytya-pairs**)

**5,373**
The number of coroners' inquest records from Suffolk added to **findmypast.co.uk**

**Ancestry**
The website has released its 2025 Ancestral Origins update (**tinyurl.com/anc-orig-up**)

Swanage Engine Shed and Turntable

# Sites given listed status to mark railway anniversary

**Seven sites on Britain's railway network have been awarded Grade II listed status by the Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport on the advice of Historic England (historicengland.org.uk).**

The sites were listed on 27 September 2025, the 200th anniversary of the first passenger train journey on the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

One of the listed sites is the Cleveland Bay (**clevelandbay.co.uk**), the earliest identified purpose-built railway pub.

The pub, in Eaglescliffe, Stockton-on-Tees, was built near a coal depot on the Stockton and Darlington Railway, and opened on 17 October 1825.

The other sites given listed status are Weybourne Station and Sheringham Station in Norfolk; Havenstreet Railway Station on the Isle of Wight; Woody Bay Station in Devon; and Northbrook Road overbridge and Swanage Engine Shed and Turntable, both on the Swanage heritage line in Dorset.

"The development of England's railway system was one of the greatest achievements of the Victorian era," said Claudia Kenyatta and Emma Squire, joint chief executives of Historic England.

"These new listings highlight key milestones in its growth and demonstrate how the railway has shaped our local places today."

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF WALES | OLDHAM COUNCIL | HISTORIC ENGLAND ARCHIVE

# Migration's Rich Rewards

**Alan Crosby** reflects on how migration has shaped New York following a recent visit

Like most family historians, I often encounter questions about migration, both within this country and overseas. My tree demonstrates that the claim we still hear often, that "Of course in those days they didn't move, they just stayed in their own village" (or variations on it), simply isn't true. Members of my family, living or long gone, have lived in Singapore, Peru, Japan, Russia, Poland, South Africa, Canada, Bermuda, Alaska and Denmark, to name but a few of a long list.

I was reminded about this question, and its historical significance, when we spent a few days in the summer in New York, where my godson was getting married in Brooklyn. As soon as we arrived at JFK Airport, I became aware of just how multicultural the city is, and just how much migration has shaped it and its character. Our taxi driver from the airport was Bangladeshi, the housekeeping lady at the hotel was from Kosovo, and the young man who pedalled us round Central Park on his rickshaw was from Burkina Faso.

It was no surprise that some 800 languages are said to be spoken in New York. Close by where we stayed in Brooklyn is the Old Polish Bakery, with an array of cakes, pastries and breads such as I hadn't seen since my last visit to Kraków, all labelled, like the shop notices and community leaflets, in Polish.

**Some 800 languages are said to be spoken in New York**

Huge numbers of Poles came in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, escaping the poverty, pogroms and punishing politics of their homeland. On a sightseeing cruise around Manhattan we of course visited the Statue of Liberty, which between 1886 and the mid-20th century symbolised arrival in the country for more than 12 million migrants coming by sea, who were 'processed' on nearby Ellis Island.

Migration of a somewhat different type was commemorated at two churches, Trinity (or Holy Trinity) and St Paul, in downtown Manhattan. Dwarfed by towering skyscrapers, these are reminders of the time when New York had recently been a Dutch colony, New Amsterdam, and was a growing seaport. Trinity was founded in 1698, destroyed in the Great Fire of New York of 1776, rebuilt, severely damaged, and rebuilt for a third and final time, reconsecrated in 1846. St Paul was originally a chapel in Trinity parish, and the building was completed in 1766. The churchyards are crammed with 18th-century gravestones, weathered and worn by time, salty sea air and ocean winds, and the interiors of both churches have classical 18th-century tablets and monuments to the departed.

Some of these, especially at St Paul, tell of migrations. For example, in the churchyard there is an imposing monument to Étienne Marie Bechet, Lord of Rochefontaine, who was born in Champagne in 1755, came to America aged 23, volunteered and had distinguished service in Washington's army as a military engineer, went back to France, was decorated by Louis XVI, returned to America and died in New York in 1814. Not far away is a monument to William James Macneven, born in County Galway in 1763. He trained as a doctor, was a leading campaigner for Irish independence, came to America in 1805 and became an important figure in American medicine, dying in 1841. His monument has a text in Irish.

So migrants might do great service, and no less interesting are the tablets in the church. There is Sir John Temple (died 1798), consul-general from "his Britannic Majesty" to America, "the First Appointment to this Country after its Independence". And what do we make of David McKean, who, according to his elegant tablet, was the "3rd and youngest son of the late Robert McKean Esq. of Kilmarnock, Scotland", and died of yellow fever in August 1795 when he was "in the midst of his usefulness"? What a lovely phrase!

**ALAN CROSBY** lives in Lancashire and is the editor of *The Local Historian*

ILLUSTRATION WWW.SUEGENT.COM

# YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO FAMILY TREES

**Chris Paton** discusses the key question that every family historian has to face: should your tree be online, or should it be offline?

You have been thinking about researching your ancestry, your relatives are emptying out the cupboards to find old family documents to help, and the family stories are beginning to flow. But how should you store such information and make it available for others to view? The simplest method is a family tree program, allowing you to document the relationships between all of your relatives, store digitised source materials, and generate research reports and tree diagrams. There are many programs available, as well as tree builders on online platforms, with some more suited to your needs than others. So which might be best for your requirements, and what are the key issues to consider when deciding how to preserve your ancestral research?

Many of the websites that host genealogical records, such as Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**), Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**), MyHeritage (**myheritage.com**) and TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**), offer basic tree-building tools to create your trees online. Most only require a basic free site subscription to use, although MyHeritage places a limit of 250 individuals that can be included with its free access, requiring a paid subscription for larger trees. Such trees can be worked on online from the comfort of home using a desktop computer, as well as through dedicated apps on smartphones and tablets, allowing work to be carried out on them while on the move.

Most records platforms will automatically search their hosted trees and records collections to identify any matches that may relate to those named on your tree, which can be an incredibly powerful way to locate cousins and records in unusual places that you may not have at first considered searching. However, you may need a paid subscription to the website to be able to view such matches once identified.

You can access your tree on Ancestry's website from a mobile app as well as your computer

## Working With DNA Results

Online hosted trees can also help to generate new leads on another front. If you have taken a DNA test with platforms such as Ancestry, MyHeritage and FamilyTreeDNA (**familytreedna.com**), you can link your family tree file to your DNA results. This then permits any genetic cousins who discover that they have a prospective match with you to consult your tree to see where your common ancestors may lie.

However, there are definite downsides to having a tree hosted online that every family historian must take into account.

One of the greatest problems is the blatant harvesting by genealogical farmers of material from other people's trees to be added to their own, without even checking if the purported matches between your two families are accurate, simply to create a large family tree as quickly as possible. Some websites will allow you to make your online trees private, so that if a match is flagged up ▶

## What Is A GEDCOM File?

Most family tree programs have their own native file formats, but the majority will also allow you to save your research as GEDCOM files, which end with '.ged'.

GEDCOM stands for Genealogical Data Communications, and is an open file format created by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1984, the organisation behind the enormous free genealogical records website FamilySearch. GEDCOM files allow you to record various fields of data into specific tags, such as name, date of birth and occupation, as well as more generic fields for general notes and sources.

FamilySearch created the file format

Virtually every family history program and online platform should allow you to import or export a GEDCOM file, enabling you to switch between programs/platforms, or to an updated version of the software. However, due to compatibility issues it is often the case that while the basic details of an individual will usually copy across fine, problems can emerge when copying data within the notes fields and other custom facts. Many programs/platforms will also not copy across any attached media, while problems can arise when trying to merge two GEDCOM trees as well.

Despite such issues it is good practice to regularly export a copy of your file after an update and to save it as a backup on a separate drive, in case of computer failure, and even to upload a copy to free tree builders on online platforms, some of which may even allow you to sync between the two as you work.

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to someone that might share a connection with you, they will have to message you first to gain permission to see what information it contains.

Note also that when hosting trees online, you should protect details of those who may be living for privacy purposes; most sites will do this automatically. This also applies to any photographs of people you might wish to attach, which are legally considered to be a form of personal data.

## Precarious Platforms

Despite their seeming resilience, it is also entirely possible that such large platforms may cease to exist at some point in the future, for example if their parent companies go bankrupt, with your data potentially lost forever. And there is also the issue of ownership; when you host your material on an online platform, the site's terms and conditions may assert some form of proprietary rights over the data that you have added, or restrictions with regards to access. These terms and conditions may change over time, going beyond the basis on which you were originally happy to host your research on the platform.

It is also worth bearing in mind that in the modern age issues over the ownership of data are fast becoming increasingly important. One way to absolutely guarantee that you retain ownership of your information is to store a copy of your research using a program on your home computer, and/or on an app on your mobile device.

There are a vast number of programs that can be bought for your home computer. Software such as Family Tree Maker (**mackiev.com/ftm**, macOS and Windows), RootsMagic (**rootsmagic.com**, macOS and Windows), Legacy Family Tree (**legacyfamilytree.com**, Windows), Family Historian (**family-historian.co.uk**, Windows), Reunion (**leisterpro.com**, macOS), TreeView (**treeview.co.uk**, both macOS and Windows) and Heredis (**home.heredis.com/en**, macOS and Windows) can all be installed on your computer, where your tree can then be developed independent of any web service or additional subscriptions; some even offer free trials with limited features, and then invite you to purchase the full program after, if satisfactory to your needs. A few, such as TreeView and Heredis, also offer access via apps on mobile devices, although syncing between these and a home computer, while possible, is not quite so straightforward.

At their most basic, such programs can allow you to create individual entries for each known relative within your ancestry,

You can attach scans of old photos to your family tree

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## Preserving Your Research For The Future

**Make sure that all of your hard work isn't wasted**

With technology constantly advancing, a computer or mobile device hosting your tree may become technically unsupported across time, and you may need to regularly update both it and your software package itself – something you may equally wish to bear in mind if you plan to pause your research for a while. Save copies via the open-source GEDCOM file on your device, and with online copies also, as a backup.

You should print out a hard copy of your research for posterity

After years of research you may be beginning to think about how best to pass on your 'digital legacy'. This is not always straightforward, particularly with online hosted trees. In most cases you cannot simply bequeath your account to your next of kin, although Ancestry does offer users an option to record a 'legacy contact', while MyHeritage has a 'digital successor' facility.

The best way to bequeath your research is to have a copy of your research stored on your device and a hard drive, with the software needed to read it.

However, the next generation may not be so engaged technologically as yourself, so it is also advisable to print off hard copies of your family history report and charts which can be easily read.

with options to document the sources found from which your understanding of such individuals emerges. You can also easily manipulate the information in different ways once it has been input into your program; for example, with a click of a button a family group sheet (noting all of the individuals within a particular branch of your tree) can be converted into a family tree diagram, or a variety of charts. Each program also has its own loyal community of users, who can collaborate through social media and forums to discuss issues, ranging from genealogical advice to technical problems.

## ONLINE TREES vs OFFLINE TREES

**Chris compares the advantages and disadvantages of online and offline trees**

| | ONLINE TREES | OFFLINE TREES |
|---|---|---|
| PROS | • Genealogical websites hosting family trees can automatically search for records connected to included individuals.<br>• Many online platforms have tree-building tools that can be used for free.<br>• Trees hosted online can be made publicly accessible, acting as 'cousin bait' to attract distant relations. | • A tree hosted on your computer is solely owned by yourself, and easily bequeathed.<br>• Digital media attached to your tree will always be accessible, and not subject to any online subscriptions sites.<br>• Programs frequently have considerably more features for charts and reports than their online equivalents. |
| CONS | • An online tree can be harvested by people to quickly populate their own trees, sometimes erroneously.<br>• A tree hosted online may be vulnerable to a platform's terms and conditions, and to the platform's own continued existence. | • Devices and software will need upgrading on a regular basis, until they eventually and inevitably become obsolete.<br>• Software usually needs to be purchased or licensed, although you may be able to take advantage of a generous free trial. |

### Defended From Deletion

A major advantage of storing your tree on your home computer is that any records and images that you may have downloaded from an online platform for inclusion will always remain there unless you delete them; by contrast, if you have linked your tree on an online platform to a particular record on the site, you will only be able to see this record so long as you have an active paid subscription (you'll still be able to view your basic tree without a paid subscription, just not any media to which you have linked).

If you decide to store your tree on your computer, bear in mind that you should regularly save backup copies of the file, in case the original becomes corrupted, or a problem develops with your device. While many programs have their own dedicated file formats, all of them will also be compatible with a universally recognised file format called GEDCOM (see the box), with files ending with '.ged'. This is particularly handy should you wish to export your research to a different program at a future stage, or indeed, should you wish to upload a copy of your research onto an online family tree platform. In fact doing this can be an additional effective way to create a backup copy of your hard work on more than one website.

**Issues over the ownership of data are fast becoming increasingly important**

Finally, some programs will in fact allow you to store a copy of your genealogical research on your home computer, and to sync any changes that you make to an online platform and/or app on your smartphone or tablet.

### Synchronisation Success

For example, Family Tree Maker allows you to sync files hosted on your computer with a parallel family tree hosted on Ancestry, while RootsMagic enables you to sync trees with both Ancestry and FamilySearch.

In addition MyHeritage's Family Tree Builder can be downloaded to your computer (Windows only), and you can sync between it and a website-hosted version of your tree, while TheGenealogist's TreeView software can also allow you to sync to your tree on TheGenealogist website itself, or on the dedicated online platform for the program **treeview.co.uk.**

A well-constructed tree is the backbone of family history research

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**CHRIS PATON** is a genealogist and tutor from East Ayrshire. Find out about his research service at **scotlandsgreateststory.co.uk**

# FROM GLASGOW TO HOLLYWOOD

Writer **Alison Kerr** reveals how she uncovered the fascinating life of her acting relation Mary Gordon

Thanks to the old Sherlock Holmes films that we used to watch on TV every week after the children's programme *Crackerjack* had finished, I have known about my family's "Hollywood relative" since my childhood. At some point in most of these movies, which starred Basil Rathbone as Holmes, a Scottish voice would catch my ear – and my granny, who we would visit after school on Fridays, would explain that it belonged to "aunt Mary Gordon". Soft-spoken, kind-faced and rather stout, with wavy white hair tied in a loose bun, Mary played Mrs Hudson, the great detective's long-suffering but devoted housekeeper.

My granny died before I became a film buff – and all my mum could tell me about Mary was that she had been my great grandmother Margaret's cousin, and that she had once attended a family reunion on Glasgow's Southside in 1946.

It was in the mid-1990s, when I was a young journalist, that I first began to trace the branch of my family tree that reached directly into the golden age of Hollywood. Once I began to realise just how many screen appearances Mary had notched up – she was in about 300 films – and how many movie legends she had worked with, I was completely bedazzled.

After all, she had been in films with Mae West, Cary Grant, Boris Karloff, Marlene Dietrich, Danny Kaye, Laurel and Hardy, and James Stewart, my favourite star. She probably played more Irish mammies than Scots maws, and was seldom seen in smart, contemporary clothes – she was usually to be found sweeping tenement closes in the Bowery or the Bronx, or hanging out her kitchen window chatting to Mrs O'Hara or Mrs O'Leary as they pulled in their clotheslines.

## World's Best Known Mother

The first port of call for any research into a Glaswegian is the Mitchell Library (**glasgowlife.org.uk/libraries/venues/the-mitchell-library**), and there I found the newspaper coverage from September 1946 about Mary's return visit – when she was described in headlines as "The World's Best Known Mother". During her five-week stay with her sister, she toured old haunts, made special appearances at cinemas, and attended a screening of the movie *Blue Skies* (1946) in the company of its composer, the legendary Irving Berlin, and Scottish entertainer Harry Lauder.

I wrote about my search in a newspaper article, and received letters from readers who remembered her visit. Consequently, I was put in touch with Mary's daughter, Molly, then in her eighties, who talked mostly about the part of her mother's life spent in the USA.

I accumulated some terrific titbits: how Mary loved to cook and sing for the soldiers at the famous Hollywood Canteen, just down the road from where she lived; how she coached Katharine Hepburn (not very successfully, ▶

## Researching A Glaswegian Ancestor

Alison explains why the Mitchell Library is a must for family historians

One of Europe's largest reference libraries, the Mitchell in Glasgow is where you will find pretty much all of the answers you're going to get if a relative spent any time in the city. The Special Collections department, on the fifth floor, houses everything related to Glasgow, from Post Office directories to local newspapers. There is free access to Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and the British Newspaper Archive (**british newspaperarchive.co.uk**), and in the City Archives section you can view school rolls and other documents by appointment. In advance of a visit questions can be sent to *specialcollections@glasgowlife.org.uk*. Finally via the Registrars Genealogy Service (0141 287 7655), also on the fifth floor, you can book a day's access to Scotland's People for £15, with staff on hand to help.

• The Mitchell Library, North Street, Glasgow G3 7DN; 0141 287 2999; *libraries@glasgowlife.org.uk*; **glasgowlife.org.uk/libraries/venues/the-mitchell-library**

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judging by the evidence) in a Scottish accent for *The Little Minister* (1934), and was given a more prominent role herself as a result; how she would bake scones for cast and crew on her sets; how her naturally white hair was dyed auburn so that it looked white onscreen; and, best of all, how she received bouquets every Mother's Day from fellow actors and movie tough guys Pat O'Brien and Victor McLaglen.

## A Life Of Drama

I assumed that her 37 years in Scotland would be the less interesting part of the story – but, when I dug into her early life in 2009, I discovered that it was every bit as fascinating, and considerably more dramatic, than her US adventure. By this time, the internet enabled me to spend hours sleuthing at home. (Along the way, I even unearthed a family secret – that my great great grandfather William Gibbons had thrown himself into the Clyde aged 70, just after he married for a third time.) I have resumed my research whenever a new census becomes available or I have access to a new newspaper archive.

So what else have I learnt about Mary Gordon's life? Well, she was born Mary Clark Gilmour in Glasgow's East End in 1882. Her parents, Allan and Mary (née Gibbons), already had three living children together, and she would be the penultimate. Allan changed jobs a few times (manager of recreation grounds, tramway company inspector, etc), and by 1891 the family had moved into one of the new baronial-style tenements built in the Saltmarket to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887.

A poster for one of Mary's many films featuring Sherlock Holmes

By 1901, all of the grown-up Gilmour children were living with their parents in the nearby Trongate, and all were working. Mary's elder sister Rebecca, unusually for the time, was self-employed, and running a confectioner's shop in which Mary also worked.

Mary with her family during a return visit to Scotland. Alison's grandmother Mina Sellars is on the back row, right

Shortly after her father's death, at the end of 1901, Mary began to make her name as a singer. Her talent had emerged during her school days when she joined the choir at Chalmers Parish Church. Decades later, she recalled how her "knees fair knocked when I had tae sing a solo".

She gained confidence from her success in local singing contests, and in 1904 she turned professional. She toured extensively with the man who would become Scotland's first international star – Harry Lauder. One review said, "Mr Lauder had the assistance of Miss Mary Gilmour, a winsome young lady with a sweet soprano voice."

By this time, Mary, her sister and their mother had migrated across the River Clyde to Mount Florida (where, decades later, in a nearby high rise, I would watch the Sherlock Holmes films). In March 1908 Mary married William Gordon, a 30-year-old yarn salesman. Surprisingly, church-going Mary was married in a registry office with no relations in attendance – and no witnesses. All that is known of William on Mary's side of the family tree is that he was "a lounge lizard". Once married, Mary stopped performing.

Nineteen months later, their daughter Mary (known as Molly) was born in their flat just a few

## 6 Tips For Hollywood Links

**Alison shares her hard-won research advice if a relation moved to Hollywood**

**Check Petitions For Naturalisation** which are available on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**). These can offer lots of information including the name of the ship on which the petitioner arrived in the USA or Canada, and the date of the crossing.

**Don't Believe What You Read** in old fan magazines. The Hollywood studios routinely made up stories.

**Don't Trust Wikipedia.** In fact don't take as fact any basic biographical information you read online or in books – always go back to the original records. Other researchers sometimes make assumptions, or repeat and reinforce erroneous information.

**Fan Out Your Research.** If you find your subject on a passenger list, scan it for other interesting names. I was thrilled to learn that Mary's shipmates on a voyage from Los Angeles to Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1931 were fellow cast and crew members from the Charlie Chan film *The Black Camel* released the same year, among them Bela Lugosi.

**Search For Your Subject Via Another Relation.** If you are researching someone with a common name in a census record or passenger list, try searching for someone else in the family with a less common name, who is likely to be with them.

**Take Family Stories With A Pinch Of Salt.** Stories grow arms and legs, and are often romanticised. Equally, in-laws or black sheep who weren't popular become villains over time. There may be *some* truth in family stories, but never take them as gospel.

GETTY IMAGES

Mary played the mother of James Cagney's character in the film *The Irish in Us* (1935)

doors along from where Mary's cousin Margaret would give birth to her two youngest children – including my grandmother.

William was still around for the 1911 census, but during the First World War Mary, her mother and Molly relocated to the seaside town of Rothesay on the Isle of Bute where they ran a boarding house. However, they soon decided to follow two of Mary's brothers who had emigrated and were living in California. The trio sailed to Canada in 1919, lived in San Francisco for a spell and finally settled in Los Angeles. Mary had hoped to relaunch her singing career, but her mother wasn't well enough to be a full-time carer to Molly so those hopes had to be set aside.

An official Universal Studios biography from the 1940s claimed that Mary was working as a cook at a movie studio near Molly's school when she decided to become an extra because the money was better and she would be able to spend more time at home. Her first film was *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) starring Lon Chaney, but the earliest film I have spotted her in is *Annie Laurie* (1927).

## The Arrival Of The Talkies

By 1930, Mary was juggling acting work with her role as a live-in housekeeper for a physician. Molly, by then a college student, was boarding at the same address. The arrival of 'talkies' improved Mary's fortunes considerably. She became much busier, and began to have her name listed in the credits.

As far as Hollywood was concerned, Mary had been widowed during the First World War, but the records show that William Gordon only enlisted in May 1918, briefly serving in the Royal Air Force. According to Molly, he later turned up in California, and was sent packing.

However, in 1937 – one of Mary's busiest years in Hollywood – British newspapers carried the strange story of a man found with his throat slit in a men's hostel. "Glasgow Man's Death – Wife a Film Actress in Hollywood?" was the headline in the *Evening Times*, and the last words of the man, who had died in hospital, were purported to be "Mary Gordon". It was her sister Rebecca's family who responded to the police appeal for relatives to come forward to identify the man as William Gordon. The story didn't make the US papers, but Mary was interviewed by a British reporter who quoted her as saying, "William Gordon passed out of my life on December 8, 1914, and I had not heard of him since then." His death was determined to have been a suicide.

Mary's cousin, and best friend, my great grandmother, died in her forties but Mary lived to the age of 81, spending her final years in a home for retired actors near Los Angeles. She died in 1963, less than a decade before I was born – and light years away from her humble Glasgow beginnings.

**Alison Kerr** is a journalist currently writing the first biography of Ella Logan (1913–1969), a largely forgotten Scottish-US actor and singer

# Resources

**Alison's recommendations**

## MUSEUM

### BUTE MUSEUM

a **7 Stuart Street, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0EP**
t 01700 505067
e *info@www.butemuseum.org.uk*
w **butemuseum.org.uk**

All aspects of the Isle of Bute are reflected in its museum and it is worth talking to the archivist, as I did, if you are researching someone who lived there.

## WEBSITES

### ANCESTRY

w **ancestry.co.uk**

The All Records subscription offers US records such as naturalisation applications and census entries, in addition to passenger lists.

### BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE

w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

I unearthed a slew of articles about Mary that backed up the story I'd heard about her touring with Harry Lauder before she left Scotland.

### IMDB

w **imdb.com**

Historically known as the Internet Movie Database, IMDb is the definitive resource if you're researching a relation in the film industry, and you want to see a comprehensive list of their credits and find out who they worked with.

### NEWSPAPERS.COM

w **newspapers.com**

This online archive includes hundreds of US publications, as well as British titles not included in the British Newspaper Archive.

### SCOTLAND'S PEOPLE

w **scotlandspeople.gov.uk**

If you're researching someone who was born or lived in Scotland, this government website should be your first stop. Births, marriages, deaths, censuses and other records are available to search, and no subscription is required – instead you buy credits to view records.

GETTY IMAGES

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WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

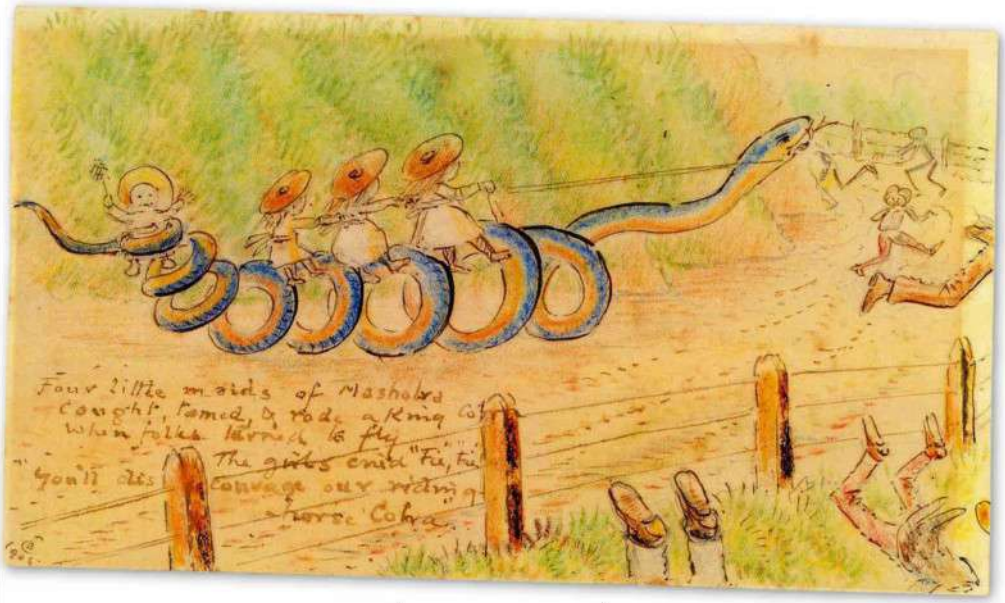
# 'My Great Grandparents Played An Important Role During The Raj'

Letters, diaries and photos inherited by Sarah King provide priceless insight into her family's time in India – and the early lives of four inspirational sisters, including her grandmother. By **Claire Vaughan**

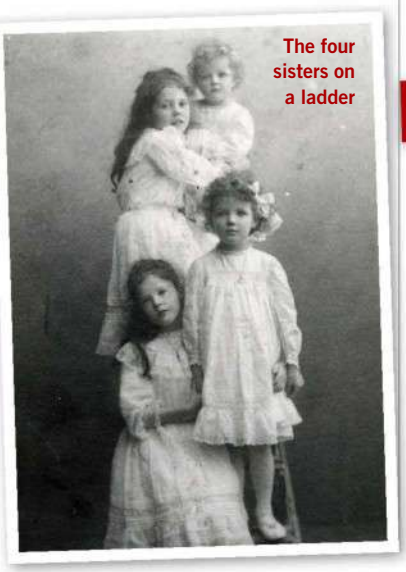
Reins in hands, three young sisters ride the coils of an enormous blue snake. Waving a rattle and smiling happily, the fourth, a baby, is held around her plump middle by its tail. Passers-by dive out of the way as the girls, astride their pet, rampage along. Below, a rhyme begins, "Four little maids of Mashobra / Caught, tamed, & rode a King Cobra."

This delightful cartoon was drawn by Colonel Sir Henry Thornhill and the maids in question were Gwynedd, Audrey, Enid and Katharine Richards. It's just one of many items that Sarah King found among a cache of 500 letters and diaries written by her great grandmother Isabel Richards (née Butler), the girls' mother, about the family's time in India during the British Raj.

"From the humour and touching anecdotes in their letters and diaries, it is clear that their approach to the sisters' upbringing, including during their formative years in India (1904–9), provided their children with the support and confidence to become those rather splendidly robust ladies that we knew," writes Sarah in *A Reluctant Memsahib: At the Court of the Viceroy*, which was published by Troubador in July this year. The book, which she decided to write as a thank you for the sisters' support when she was growing up, while her mother was ill, goes some way to explaining the lasting impact India had on the four girls – and why they took the fascinating paths they did later in life.




Colonel Sir Henry Thornhill's cartoon of the four sisters with a giant snake



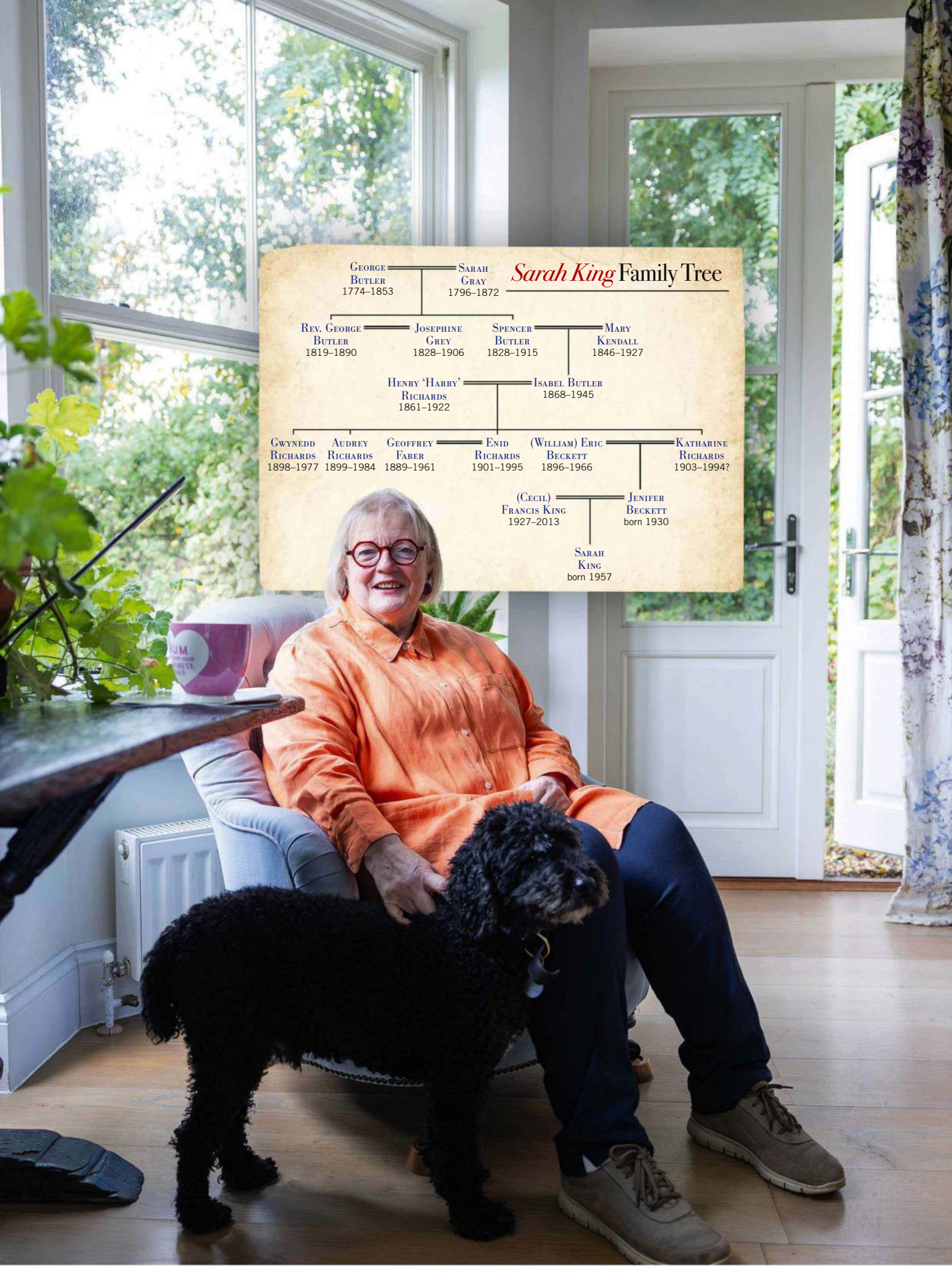
The four sisters on a ladder

**Their approach to the girls' upbringing provided support and confidence**

A former journalist and PR who lives in Wimbledon, South-West London, Sarah is dyslexic and found reading the handwritten letters and diaries a real challenge. "I nearly gave up, but my friend Alison came to my rescue and offered to transcribe them and help with the research," she tells *WDYTYA? Magazine*.

Born to a solicitor named Spencer Butler (1828–1915) and his wife Mary Kendall (1846–1927), Isabel Butler (1868–1945) spent her childhood in London – one of 12 children. "Coming from a family of educators and women campaigners, she prized education for women highly." She grew up surrounded by strong female role models. Her uncle George (1819–1890) was married to the feminist and social reformer Josephine Butler née Grey (1828–1906). ▶

UNP/TIM KAVANAGH


Sarah King Family Tree
George Butler 1774–1853
Sarah Gray 1796–1872
Rev. George Butler 1819–1890
Josephine Grey 1828–1906
Spencer Butler 1828–1915
Mary Kendall 1846–1927
Henry 'Harry' Richards 1861–1922
Isabel Butler 1868–1945
Gwynedd Richards 1898–1977
Audrey Richards 1899–1984
Geoffrey Faber 1889–1961
Enid Richards 1901–1995
(William) Eric Beckett 1896–1966
Katharine Richards 1903–1994?
(Cecil) Francis King 1927–2013
Jenifer Beckett born 1930
Sarah King born 1957

Isabel met and fell in love with Henry 'Harry' Richards (1861–1922), a barrister, and the couple married on 29 July 1897.

"Harry's big break came later that year when he started working as junior counsel at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague," writes Sarah.

They welcomed their first baby, Gwynedd, in 1898. A year later Audrey was born, with Enid following in 1901. Just after the arrival of a fourth daughter, Katharine, in November 1903, Harry was appointed as the legal member of the viceroy's Executive Council in India, overseeing the administration of law in the country including drafting and interpreting legislation.

## The Die Is Cast

In a letter to her mother, Isabel wrote, "Now prepare yourself for rather a shock. The die is cast and we go to India… Personally, I would rather have a crust in England than riches elsewhere, but it [the appointment] is a great compliment… so we must all make the best of it."

The Richards travelled to Bombay in March 1904 on the ocean liner RMS *Arabia*. Isabel wrote jokily to her mother, "Enid is a great favourite… she really is very funny. She struts about in her independent way. She was in the top berth in my cabin when I was dressing for dinner the other night. Having very little on, I was horrified to find she had opened the window and was talking to someone. 'I'm 'aving a little talk with this man' she said."

The family then travelled on by train to Simla (now Shimla) in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh and Windcliffe, the house where they would be living for half the year, relocating to Calcutta (now Kolkata) during the warmer months.

Harry and Isabel settled into the social whirl in Simla, both hosting parties and dinners and attending them. A typical day would feature many 'at home' visits, and at least one significant social engagement. On 8 September 1904, she wrote, "H and I lunched with the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, met the Beatsons and others there. Fearfully long lunch, winding up with several curries all together, came home to receive the Rajah of Nabha."

"As well as domestic details," Sarah says, "the letters offer a totally fresh impression of the extraordinary way the British Empire conducted itself, and the tight social laws that governed every aspect of the lives of those involved – especially the women – with all its 'rules of precedence' which even dictated who would sit next to whom at dinner."

Isabel's correspondence also offers first-hand accounts of key figures and the events in India over five of the most significant years in the history of the British Empire. "I knew nothing about Lord Curzon, the viceroy of India between 1899 and 1905, who sounds the most extraordinarily arrogant man, or his battles (for example with the India Office and Lord Kitchener, who was head of the Indian Army), or his dramatic and deeply humiliating downfall," Sarah explains.

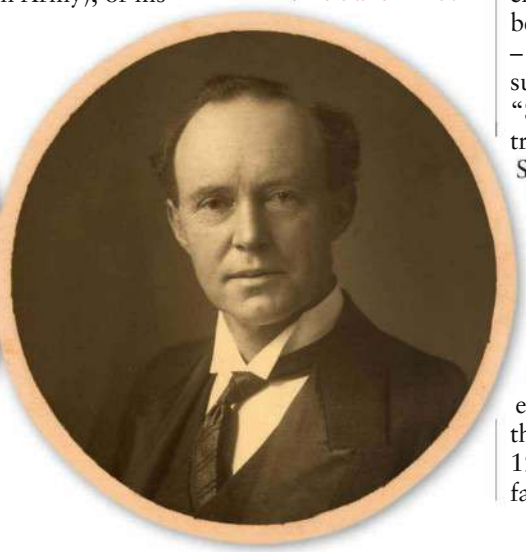
Sarah has an impressive family archive of letters and other material

Interspersed with Isabel's comments about domestic matters and Indian politics were lovely stories about the girls. "The children each have a little garden and are much excited over seeds which I suggested to their Richards aunts to send out. Enid now firmly refuses to put hers under the ground as she must go and see how they're getting on 2 or 3 times a day and 'how can she see if there's earth over them?'."

Photographs, too, reveal much about the young girls' childhood in India. In one, they sit in a rickshaw wearing pith helmets, surrounded by Indian staff, while another shows Enid and Katharine playing in the garden with Polly, their *ayah* (nursemaid). They're also pictured riding an elephant.

Along with Isabel's love for her children, her letters illustrate her belief in education for women – she worked to raise money to support Indian schools for girls. "Sometimes behind 'liberal elite' trailblazers like Josephine Butler," Sarah tells *WDYTYA? Magazine*, "and all those extraordinary women who, against the odds, achieved so much, were parents who fortunately believed in educating their daughters."

Isabel's diary also includes an account of the terrible Kangra earthquake, which killed more than 20,000 people. On 4 April 1905, while Harry was away, the family were woken at 6.10am



These portraits of Isabel and Harry were taken in 1904

UNP/TIM KAVANAGH

by the tremors. She was clearly terrified: "The shaking was most violent, with the walls and ceilings creaking and groaning and ornaments falling and crashing. I rushed into the nursery and found the children very frightened… The shocks continued till about 1pm and alarmed us a good deal."

The family made a great many friends in India including Colonel Sir Henry Thornhill, who drew the cartoon of the girls.

Audrey recalled late in life, "I remember him as a very tall man with ferocious moustaches, an enormous broad-brimmed hat and a long twirly staff always followed by a troop of dogs… a correspondence began with Colonel Thornhill sending us a series of charming, Hilaire Belloc-like crayon drawings depicting imagined scenes in our lives – of us riding jungle animals accompanied by a whole variety of birds, snakes, frogs, fish and beetles."

## Turmoil In India

In 1908 Harry and Isabel decided to return to England, keen for the girls to begin their schooling. The decision also followed the Mohmand tribe's uprising of 1897–1898; a bomb attack on a train carriage, in which Bengali nationalists killed two British women; and an intense period of work for Harry including preparing the controversial 1909 Indian Council's Act, which gave Indians more involvement in the government of British India.

**TELL YOUR STORY**

**Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!**

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

Harry, Isabel's brother Harcourt and the girls

Isabel's diary reflects her excitement: "My mind is so full of plans for our homecoming I can think of little else." In June 1908, she wrote to her mother, "We have provisionally taken passage on the *City of York* which leaves Calcutta Jan 15th to 20th, so we should be back by 20th Feb." The family said their goodbyes. "Harry's departure was covered in all the major papers, profiling his work in India," Sarah writes.

As adults, the sisters carved out very different lives. "The two eldest, both single, had successful careers and became pioneers in their chosen fields," the book explains. Gwynedd was one of the first to study social work at the London School of Economics. She went on to work with the charities Save the Children and Barnardo's, and create the first national adoption system.

"Audrey, influenced by her time in India and by her father's interest in its history, became one of the UK's leading anthropologists," Sarah writes. She studied at the University of Cambridge, finishing her career as director of its African Studies Centre, and became the first woman to hold the position of president of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (RAI).

"Enid married Geoffrey Faber (1889–1961), who founded the publishers Faber & Faber, where she helped with reading and proposing manuscript novels submitted in the hope of publication, whilst bringing up three children," the book adds.

As for Sarah's grandmother Katharine, she wed William Eric Beckett (1896–1966), known as Eric, a fellow of All Souls College at the University of Oxford, actively supporting his work as chief legal adviser at the Foreign Office during the Second World War and through the creation of the United Nations – and bringing up their four children.

Not bad for four women whose younger selves were depicted causing havoc from the back of a giant snake, and who grew up in an era where men had it all.

Writing *A Reluctant Memsahib* has been a real labour of love. "I gained confidence in knowing what I could achieve," Sarah says – especially with four such inspirational relatives cheering her on, albeit posthumously.

*A Reluctant Memsahib* (Troubador, 2025) is available now (RRP £14.99)

## Resources

**Sarah uncovered her relatives' story with these resources**

### Contemporary Books

Sarah found travel guides, biographies, collections of speeches and even children's books from the period really useful for building up a picture of her family's life in India. Out-of-copyright titles can often be downloaded from the Internet Archive (**archive.org**).

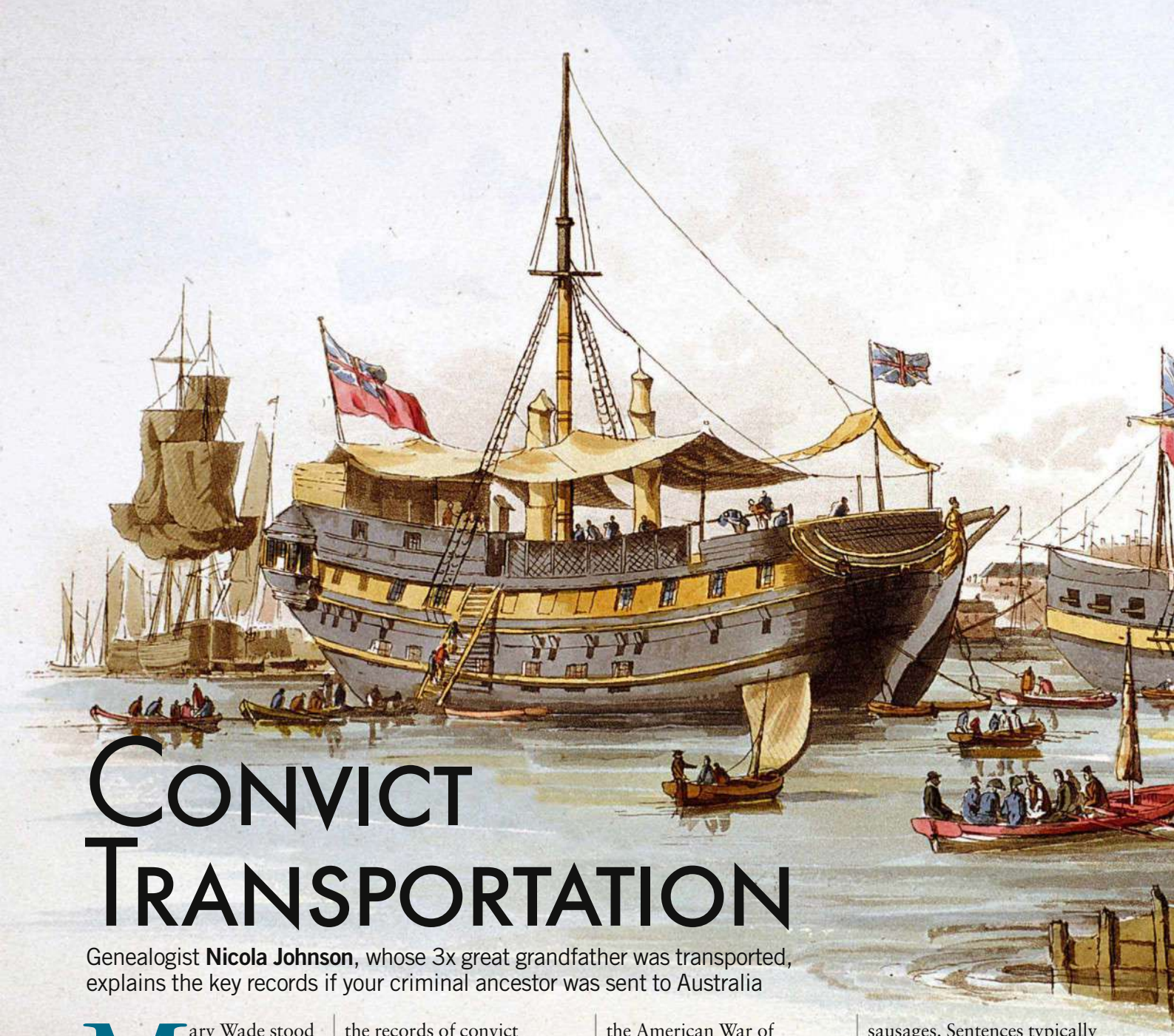
### Families In British India Society (FIBIS)

w **fibis.org**

If your ancestors lived in India during the Raj, this site should be your first stop. Here you can search birth/baptism, marriage and death/burial records from across the country, and records relating to education and work; military, railways and the civil service; and wills and probate.

### Family Papers

Many families have a cache of papers that are passed down from one generation to the next, and added to over time. These might include letters, diaries, photos and newspaper articles. Sarah was left just such a stash, some of which is now preserved by the British Library (**bl.uk**).



# Convict Transportation

Genealogist **Nicola Johnson**, whose 3x great grandfather was transported, explains the key records if your criminal ancestor was sent to Australia

Mary Wade stood trial at the Old Bailey in 1789 for stealing a few items of clothing. She was only 10 years old, but London's central criminal court condemned her to hang. Her sentence was commuted to transportation for life and she was dispatched across the world to Australia on a convict ship, never to return. Mary's story is a vivid reminder that the 162,000 men, women and children who were transported to Australia between 1787 and 1868 left extraordinary legacies.

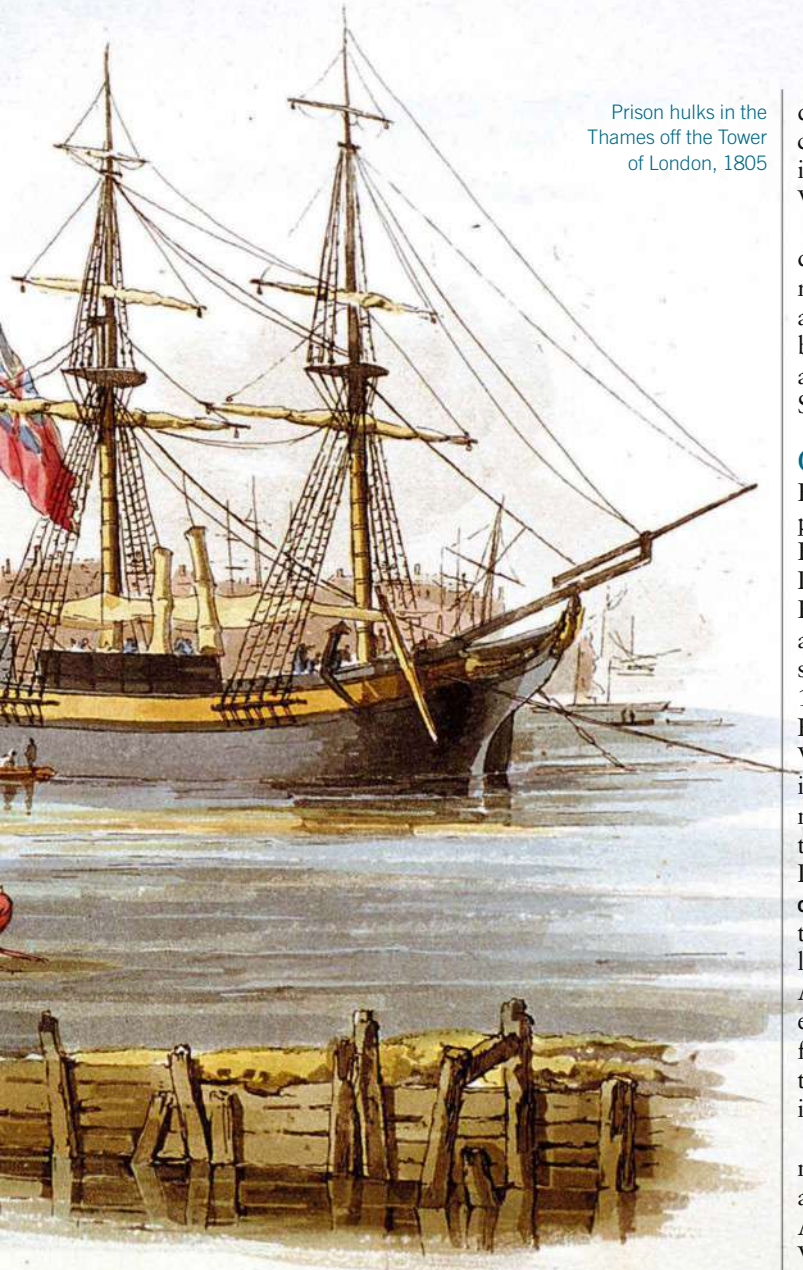
For family historians, the records of convict transportation are unusually rich, allowing us to trace individuals from the courtroom in Britain to the colonies of Australia. Their importance has even been recognised by UNESCO, which lists them among the world's most significant documentary collections.

These records form part of a much longer history of transportation. From the early 1600s, Britain had been sending convicts to its American colonies. That ended abruptly with the American War of Independence (1775–1783), when the newly independent USA refused to accept any more. Faced with overflowing prisons, Britain decided to establish a penal colony in New South Wales, on land claimed in 1770 but not yet settled by Britain or any other European power.

Most convicts were sentenced for theft, often of everyday items such as animals, clothing or food. One man was condemned for stealing an umbrella, another for taking a single string of sausages. Sentences typically ran to seven or 14 years, but under the 'Bloody Code' – harsh laws introduced during the 18th and early 19th centuries – even petty theft could carry the death penalty. Increasingly, these death sentences were commuted to transportation for life to Australia.

**Mary was only 10, but London's central criminal court condemned her to hang**

Most British convicts came from England's industrial towns, with smaller numbers from Scotland and Wales who were routed through English ports. About one in seven convicts was female, and a fifth were under the age of 20. The majority of convicts were sent to New South Wales (arriving



Prison hulks in the Thames off the Tower of London, 1805

1788–1850) or Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania, 1803–1853), with smaller numbers later dispatched to Western Australia (1850–1868). Victoria was never a direct penal colony, although convicts were present when it separated from New South Wales in 1851.

The area of modern-day Brisbane hosted some reoffenders (1824–1839), but all transportation had ended before Queensland became a separate colony from New South Wales in 1859.

## Court Records

For many convicts, the paper trail begins in Britain's court system. The Proceedings of the Old Bailey (**oldbaileyonline.org**) are especially rich, offering searchable transcripts of 197,752 trials (1674–1913). Here we can read Mary Wade's case word-for-word, including the dreadful moment she was sentenced to death. The Digital Panopticon (**digitalpanopticon.org**) is an invaluable tool that links Old Bailey trials like Mary's with later Australian convict records, enabling researchers to follow an individual from the courtroom to their fate in the colonies.

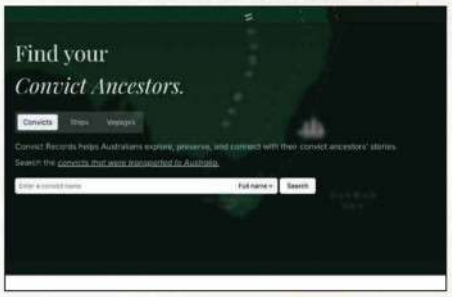
For cases outside London, national record sets are a good starting point. Ancestry's 'England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791–1892' allows you to filter for transportation sentences (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1590/**), while Findmypast's collection 'England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770–1935' extends coverage with petitions for clemency, prison registers and other details (**search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/england-and-wales-crime-prisons-and-punishment-1770-1935**).

Local newspapers often capture details missing from court records, such as the accused's defence. The subscription site the British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**) contains more than 96.2 million digitised pages (over 614,000 are free-to-view provided you register), while additional coverage may be available in the local archives where a forebear was tried.

After conviction, prisoners might wait months or even years on prison hulks in Britain before finally being shipped to Australia. The Home Office: Convict Transportation Registers, in series HO 11 at The National Archives in Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**), record names, ships and destinations, and are an essential overview of who was sent and when. They can be accessed through TNA's online catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C8875**), but are ▶

# Expert Picks

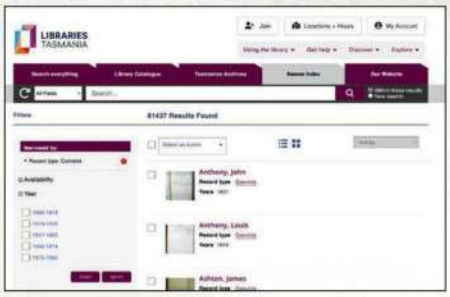
Nicola recommends these brilliant free websites for researching a transported relation




### Convict Records Of Australia

w **convictrecords.com.au**

This database linking names to ships, crimes and sentences draws together records of nearly 155,000 transported convicts.




### Tasmanian Name Index

w **tinyurl.com/libraries-tasmania-con**

The search page at Libraries Tasmania's site unlocks lifetime records for Van Diemen's Land convicts, with images included.

### Trove

w **trove.nla.gov.au**

Run by the National Library of Australia, this wonderful website provides access to millions of digitised newspapers.

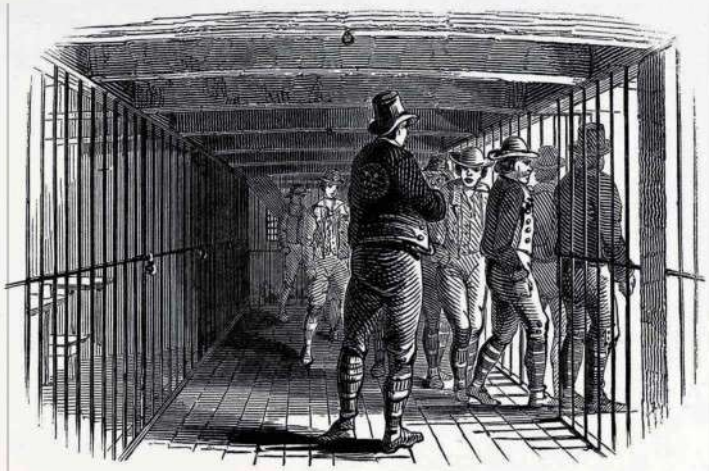
GETTY IMAGES

not name-searchable. The research site Convict Records Australia (**convictrecords.com.au**) links the material in HO 11 with other sources, but does not provide copies of original pages. For images and fully searchable access, you'll need to use subscription sites such as MyHeritage (**myheritage.com**), TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**), Ancestry and Findmypast.

## High Mortality

Early voyages could last up to 11 months, with shipwrecks an ever-present danger. Convicts chained below decks endured dreadful conditions, and mortality sometimes exceeded 20 per cent. From 1801, reforms improved survival with payments to captains for each convict landed alive and the appointment of ship's surgeons. Their journals record outbreaks of disease, accidents and deaths at sea, and some are on Ancestry in the collections 'UK, Royal Navy Medical Journals, 1817–1856' (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2318**) and 'UK Surgeon Superintendents' Journals of Convict Ships, 1858–1867' (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2320/**). For example, in 1833 the surgeon's journal of the *Frances Charlotte* recorded eight women dying of cholera and three of dysentery.

On arrival, convicts were recorded on lists known as indents (see the annotated document). These extremely useful records often include occupations, literacy and even physical descriptions.



Convicts on HMS *Warrior*, moored at Woolwich as a prison hulk 1840–1857

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Many of those sentenced to transportation never sailed, and spent years in prisons or on prison hulks. The Convict Transportation Registers will reveal if they sailed or not.

For Western Australia, most indent images are only available through Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/60668**). The website of Museums of History New South Wales (MHNSW) holds free-to-view indents up to 1801 for that state (see **mhnsw.au/indexes/convicts/convict-indents-index**), while Ancestry's collection extends coverage to 1842 (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2024**). Libraries Tasmania (**libraries.tas.gov.au**) also holds a limited set of digitised indents for Van Diemen's Land.

## Colonial Life

Life in the colonies was dominated by compulsory hard labour. Convicts had no say in the work they were assigned, with many having to build roads, bridges and public buildings in punishing conditions. Those with useful skills – such as carpenters and blacksmiths – sometimes fared better, being steered into their trades instead. Women were usually placed as domestic servants or confined in grim 'female factories', where they manufactured the cloth that was needed for the growing colonies. Children were sent to reform institutions, or punished alongside adults.

For family historians, the records of this daily drudgery are unusually detailed. A key resource is Libraries Tasmania's Convict Records hub (**libraries.tas.gov.au/family-history/convicts-in-van-diemens-land-now-tasmania/convict-life/convict-records**), which links together employment records, conduct registers and much more.

Colonial authorities loved paperwork, creating another invaluable source for today's researchers: the musters, an early form of census. The Biographical Database of Australia (BDA) details these (**bda-online.org.au/sources/musters-census**), and Ancestry

## Mark Jefferey 1824–c1894

**How one transported convict eventually turned his life around**

Mark Jefferey (frequently spelled Jeffrey) was born in 1824 in Wood Ditton, Cambridgeshire. Leaving home at 15, he drifted into crime and violence. Criminal registers record that he was initially sentenced to 15 years' transportation for burglary and was confined on the convict hulk *Warrior* at Woolwich, South-East London. He then assaulted the chief warden, and Old Bailey transcripts reveal that his sentence was increased to life transportation. He was held briefly at Pentonville Prison, Islington, North London, where officials described him as "violent and outrageous".

The Convict Transportation Registers confirm Jefferey's departure on the ship *Eliza* in 1849. Initially sent to Norfolk Island, he was later transferred to Van Diemen's Land, where officials kept detailed records that traced much of his imprisonment. They even provided a detailed physical description: he walked with a limp, had a scar on his lip and moles between his eyebrows.

Mark Jefferey turned to crime after leaving home as a teen

Conduct records reveal that Jefferey was given numerous punishments for disturbing the peace, refusal of orders, and violence.

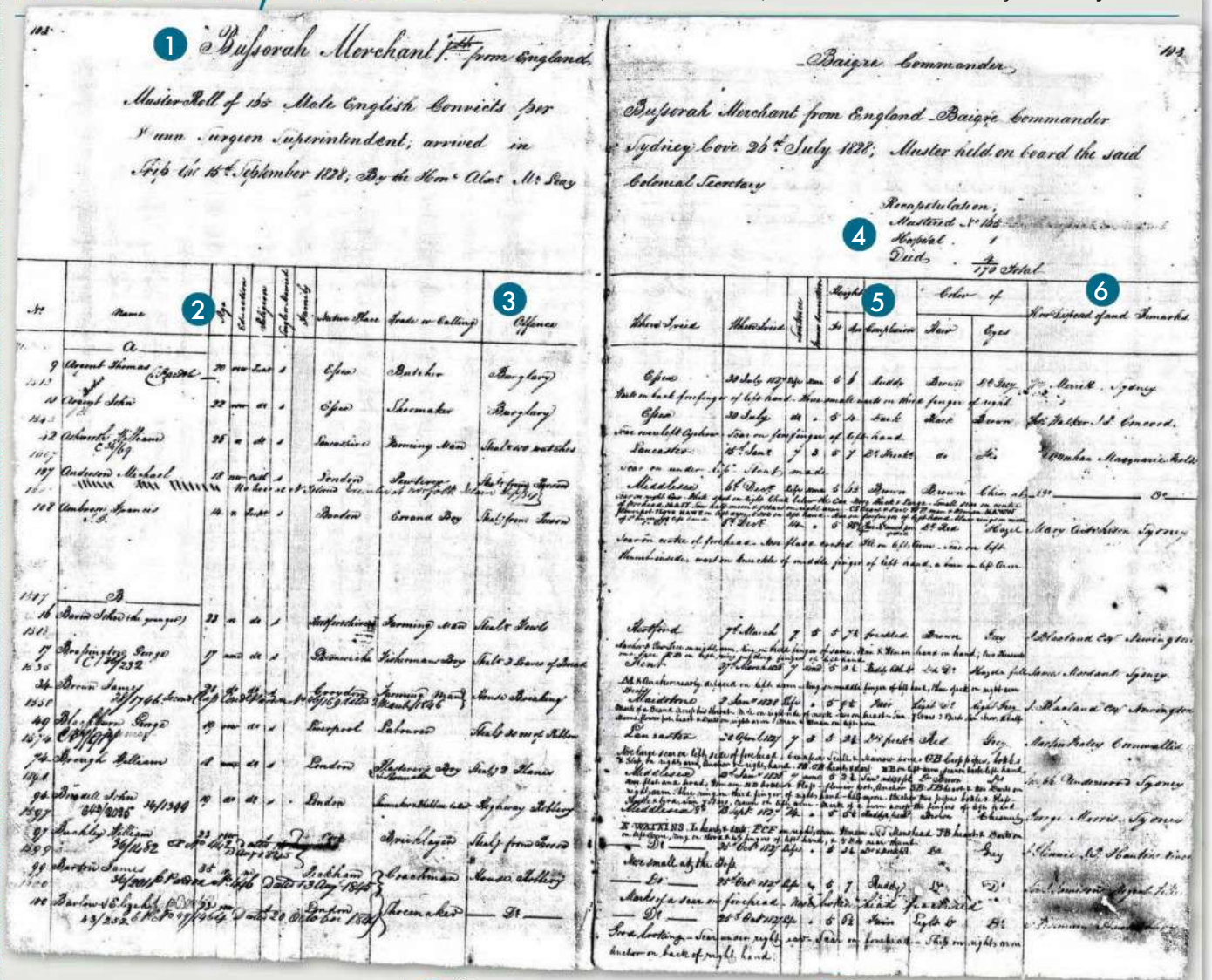
After a fatal fight with another prisoner, Jefferey was convicted of manslaughter and again sentenced to life imprisonment. Subsequently two tickets of leave were revoked before he finally secured a conditional pardon in 1860.

He then supported himself as a hawker and became locally known as 'Big Mark, the Great English Burglar'. The publication of *A Burglar's Life* in 1893 provided a vivid account of his convict years. It reveals a man who turned increasingly to religion, expressing remorse before his probable death in 1894 and burial in Hobart. The book can be freely downloaded from the Internet Archive at **tinyurl.com/arch-burg-life**.

GETTY IMAGES

# Indent, 1828

This convict indent is held by the Museums of History New South Wales and available digitally in the collection 'New South Wales, Australia, Convict Indents, 1788–1842' on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**)




## 1 Ship's Details

The first lines give the ship's name, where it had sailed from, plus arrival port and date and whether it carried male or female convicts. This ship, the *Bussorah Merchant*, arrived in Sydney in 1828.

## 2 Convict's Details

These columns record name, age, education, religion, marital status, number of children, place of origin, and occupation. Such details are vital to confirm identities.

## 3 Offence

The crime, trial details and sentence length are all recorded, which provides a crucial link back to British court records for each transported convict.

## 4 Casualties

Here you'll see how many convicts embarked, how many died en route, and how many were hospitalised on arrival. This ship had four deaths during the voyage, out of a total of 170 convicts.

## 5 Description

Height, complexion, hair and eye colour were carefully noted along with details of tattoos and scars, giving family historians a rare physical picture of their forebear.

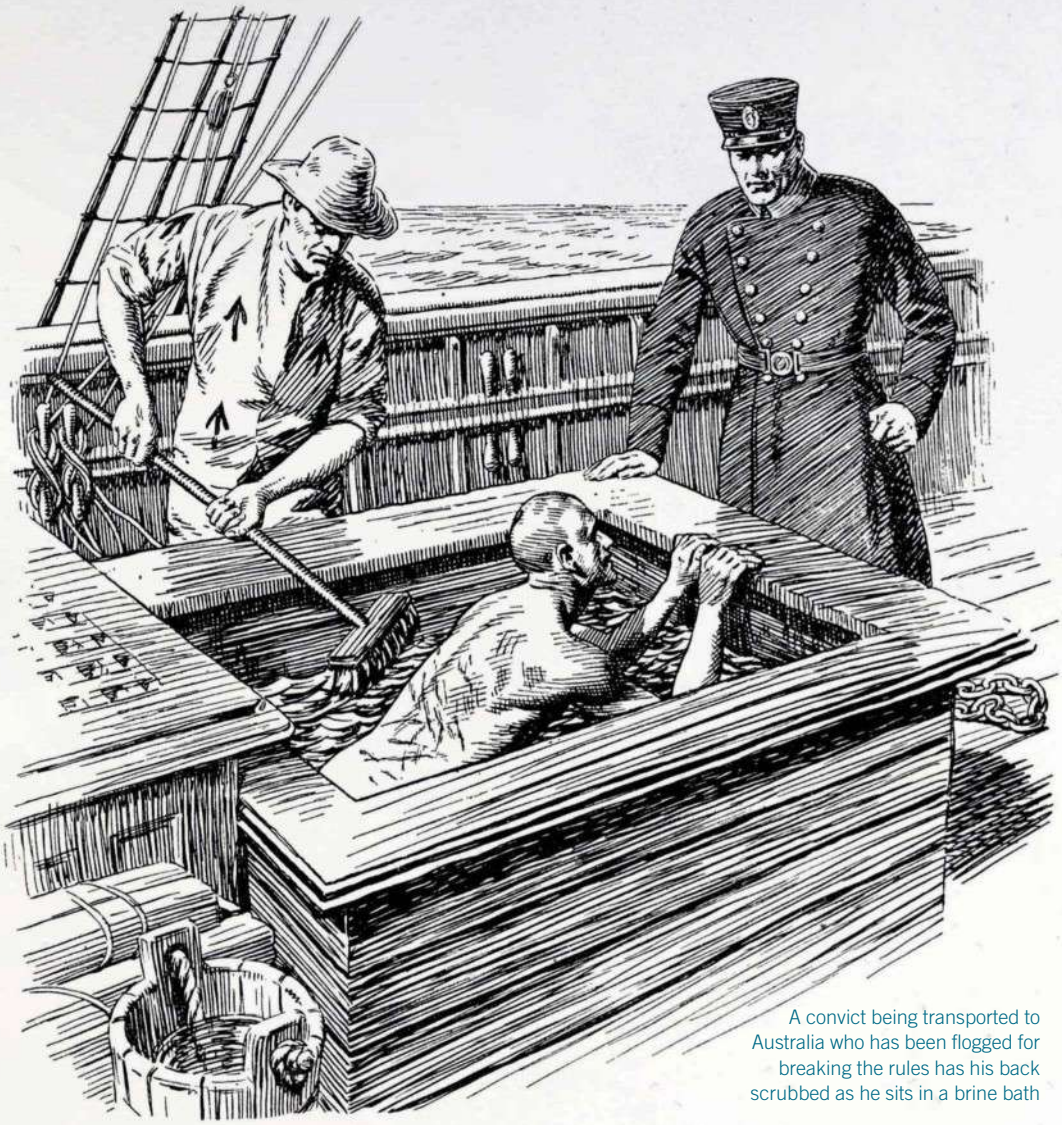
## 6 How Disposed Of

This column records each convict's immediate placement after arrival, showing where they were sent or assigned – for example, to a private master, government work gang, or district.

holds more than 277,000 entries in its collection 'New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia Convict Musters, 1806–1849' (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1185**).

The first formal Australian census in 1828, which covered New South Wales, recorded both convicts and ex-convicts; the digitised alphabetical returns can be browsed at MHNSW's site (**mhnsw.au/guides/1828-census**) or searched by name at Findmypast in the collection at **findmypast.co.uk/discover/census-land-and-surveys/census/new-south-wales-1828-census-householders-returns.**

Many convicts married, usually to fellow transportees and sometimes while a spouse was still alive back in Britain. More than 18,000 applications to marry are indexed at MHNSW's site (**mhnsw.au/indexes/convicts/**



A convict being transported to Australia who has been flogged for breaking the rules has his back scrubbed as he sits in a brine bath

▶ **convicts-applications-to-marry**), with alphabetical registers on Libraries Tasmania's website – **libraries tas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/tas/search/results?qu=application&qu=to&qu=marry**.

Misconduct could mean severe punishment, from flogging and solitary confinement to years of hard labour in chain gangs. Serious offenders were banished to remote secondary penal colonies such as Norfolk Island, Port Macquarie and Moreton Bay, where they were subjected to harsh discipline. At the Queensland State Archives' website, you can explore free searchable records – and even some convict photographs – from the Moreton Bay settlement (**https://qld.gov.au/recreation/arts/heritage/archives/collection/convicts**). One in 10 convicts never escaped the system, dying while still under their sentence. A notorious example is William 'Jackey Jackey' Westwood (1820–1846), who was hanged after leading a mutiny on Norfolk Island.

## Earning Their Freedom

Despite harsh beginnings, most convicts did achieve freedom. A ticket of leave allowed them to live independently within a set district, while a certificate of freedom marked the end of a sentence. Conditional pardons lifted most restrictions provided the individual did not return home, while the rare absolute pardon restored full rights. Many of these documents survive in great numbers: the website Convict Records Australia is again an excellent starting point for family historians. It includes details from these records, incorporates TNA's HO 10 'Settlers and Convicts' series, and lets you 'claim' a convict forebear.

Transportation was intended as punishment, yet for many it became the foundation of a new life, with convicts becoming the forebears of modern Australians. Against the odds, Mary Wade survived, married, and went on to have a reputed 21 children. Today her descendants number in the tens of thousands – among them Kevin Rudd, who has twice served as Australia's prime minister. Mary's story reminds us that a single case of petty theft could alter the course of generations – and that the records created allow us to trace those lives in detail.

Transportation itself ended in New South Wales in 1850, Van Diemen's Land in 1853, and Western Australia in 1868, closing one of the most remarkable chapters in Britain's penal history.

### TOP TIP!

Convicts often used aliases, or spelled their names multiple ways. Remember to search for name variations if you're struggling to find your relation in the records.

## Resources

**Take your research further**

**BOOKS**

*Convicts in the Colonies*
**Lucy Williams**
*Pen & Sword, 2018*
This fascinating history gives details of the Britons who were forced to sail to Australia and their lives in the penal colonies.

*The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding*
**Robert Hughes**
*William Collins, 1986*
The definitive history of transportation to Australia can be borrowed from the Internet Archive via **tinyurl.com/arch-fatal-shore**.

**WEBSITES**

AUSTRALIAN DICTIONARY OF BIOGRAPHY
w **https://adb.anu.edu.au**
This website provides informative descriptions of the lives of significant and representative people in the country's history, with convicts among them.

FEMALE CONVICTS RESEARCH CENTRE
w **femaleconvicts.org.au**
You can register for free to access a volunteer-compiled database and resources on female convicts in Van Diemen's Land.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA
w **tinyurl.com/nla-con-guide**
This illustrated research guide to convict records covers trials, hulks, voyages, arrivals and assignment, with tips and links to resources.

**NICOLA JOHNSON**
is a genealogist and writer, and runs the research company All About Ancestors (**allaboutancestors.com**)

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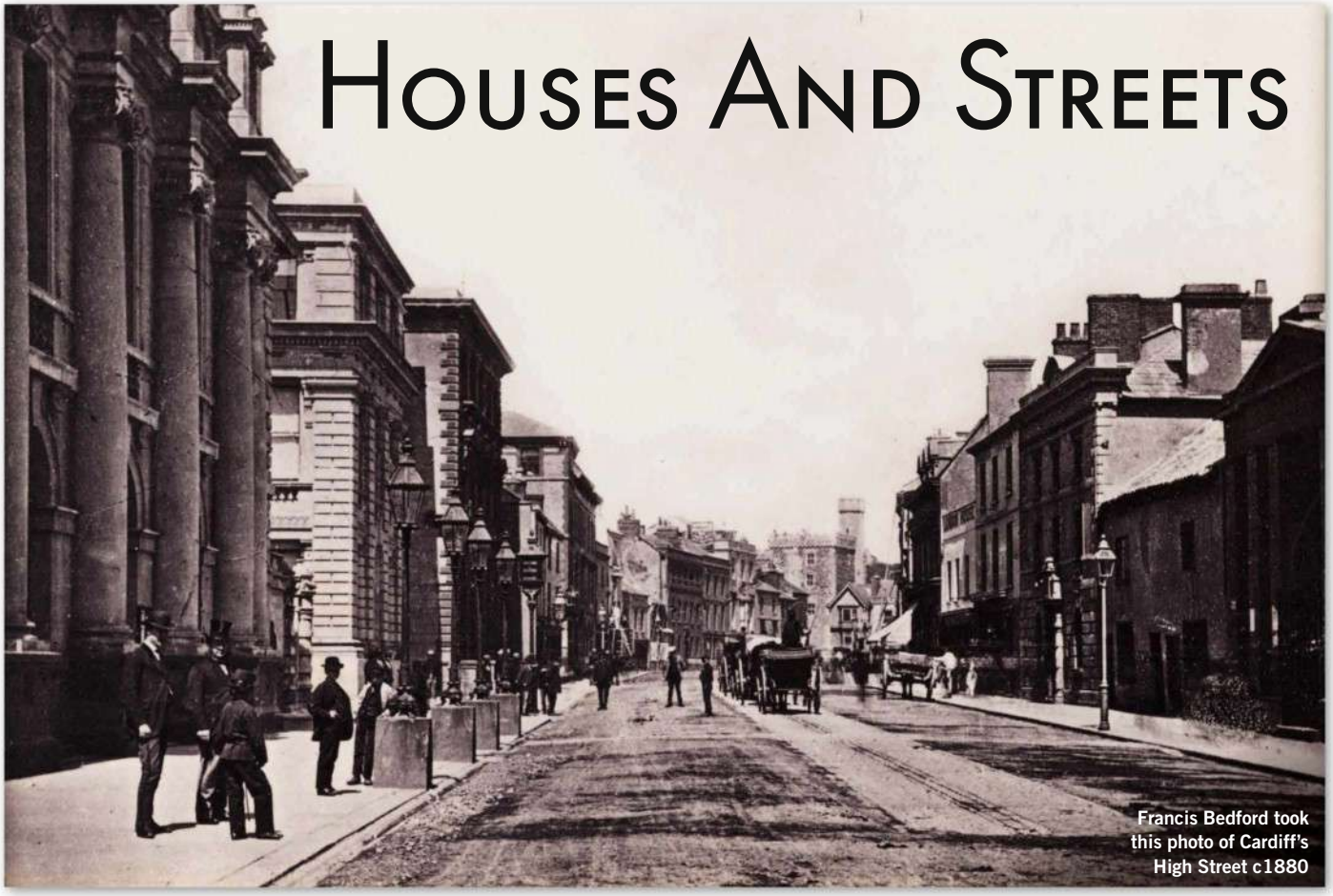
# Houses And Streets

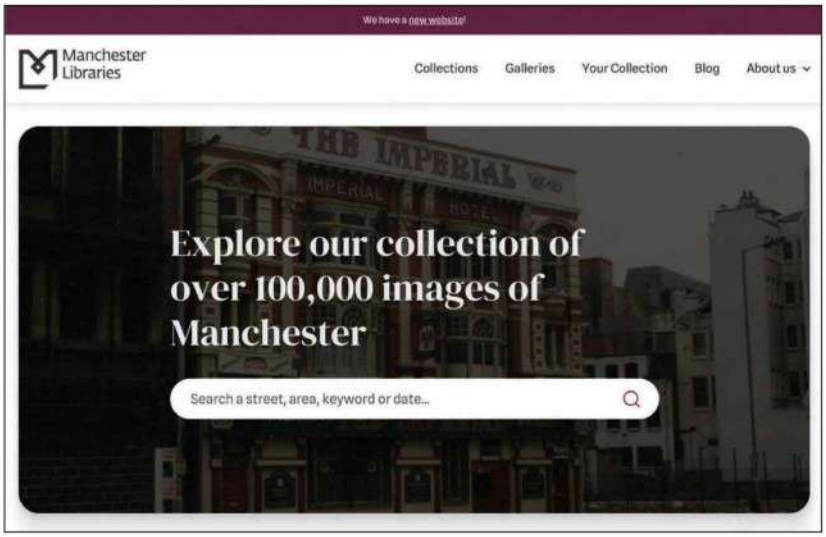


Francis Bedford took this photo of Cardiff's High Street c1880

These sites offer you a window to the world your ancestors knew, writes **Jonathan Scott**

There's never been so many well-stocked sources of historic photographs online. We've tried to pull together some examples of regional image libraries, as well as useful nationwide resources. While many are geared toward selling you prints, the old frustrations of tiny thumbnails, disappointing resolution and oversized watermarks are gradually giving way to much more user-friendly fare. In fact many of these sites offer you the ability to click, zoom, rotate and print to your heart's content.

For blanket coverage of an area, it's worth seeing if the local council's own photographic collections have been digitised. These tend to have a utilitarian rather than artistic bent, often taken from angles designed to show the maximum number of buildings. For this reason, if your family lived at the end of a street, or on a corner, you're that much more likely to find their home. Even if you can't find a particular street, these sources can help you piece together other visual markers of the past – schools, factories, offices, workshops, train stations, bus routes, shops and pubs.




## MANCHESTER IMAGES

W **images.manchester.gov.uk**

This excellent resource of 100,000 photos is based on the Manchester Local Image Collection at Manchester Central Library. Click an image and a new page appears with the option to download or purchase it. This thumbnail might seem disappointing at first, but just click the full-screen icon and you'll see that the resolution is generally excellent. You'll probably want to choose to match 'This exact phrase' when you're searching the database too. A search by 'Furness Road' resulted in 27,861 matches, but selecting 'This exact phrase' reduced the results to four. Down the left-hand side of the search-results page you can choose 'Only records with image', or narrow by collection – such as the city council's archive or pictures by amateur photographers.

GETTY IMAGES

# BEST WEBSITES

## VIRTUAL MITCHELL

w **www.mitchelllibrary.org/virtualmitchell**

Glasgow's Mitchell Library is home to about 50 photographic collections that together contain more than 90,000 images. These include those taken by pioneering local Thomas Annan (1829–1887), who captured city-centre slums before their demolition in the 1860s. You can explore many of these collections via the Virtual Mitchell image library. This is not the most up-to-date website featured this month, but scores over rivals through its simple search options that include 'area', 'subject' and, most usefully, 'street'. Clicking the latter takes you to a simple hyperlinked A-to-Z of the city, which in turn leads to any photographs of a specific street.

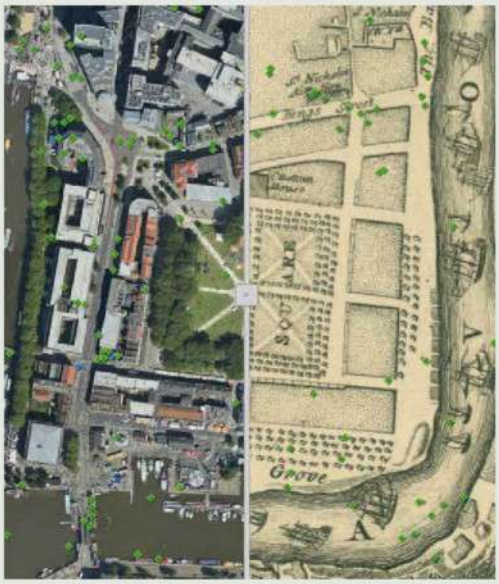
## NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND'S MAPS WEBSITE

w **maps.nls.uk**

This is the largest collection of Ordnance Survey (OS) maps of Scotland and the rest of the UK freely available online. You can search these in a numbers of ways, but for our purposes we'll try the Georeferenced Maps tool. Here you can either click-and-drag the map itself, or use the search boxes to trawl by modern place name, grid reference or postcode, or place names found within OS six-inch series maps dating from 1888–1915. This latter tool is particularly useful for tracking down streets and buildings that have either disappeared, or had names that have simply fallen out of use in the intervening decades.

## EXPERT'S CHOICE

**Karen Averby** is a historian and research consultant (**archangelheritage.co.uk**)

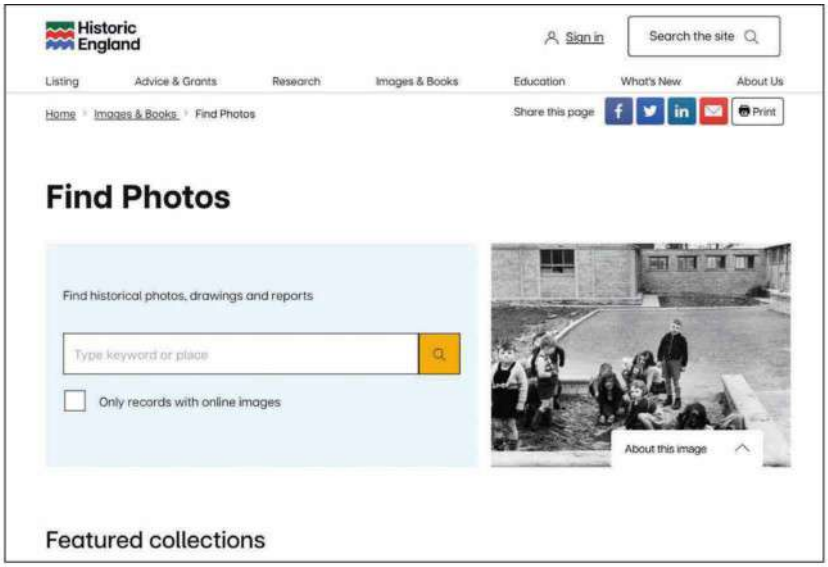


Two maps of Bristol's Queen Square compared on the site

One of the best ways to engage with built heritage in the south-west of England online is the National Lottery Heritage Funded project Know Your Place. This comprises several interactive digital-mapping resources covering Bath and North-East Somerset, Bristol, Devon, Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and Somerset, and Wiltshire, as well as Worcester; all are hosted and managed by Bristol City Council at **maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/**. The resources contain historic maps from the British Library and National Library of Scotland, 1940s aerial imagery courtesy of English Heritage, modern Ordnance Survey maps, archive collections, and community input.

To access the relevant material, search Google for "Know Your Place" followed by the name of any of the regions covered to view two maps of the area side by side separated by a vertical slider. Simply click-and-drag the slider across to compare places today with the past. You can swap out the main map or the comparison map to view aerial photos, 1950s town plans, 1840s tithe maps and more.

By default the map is dotted with green 'Community layer' icons from public contributions. Click on these to see old and new photographs of buildings, architectural details, street scenes, plans, postcards and drawings. Clicking other layers in the right-hand 'Information Layers' box reveals other elements, such as town houses, historic cinemas, old street names, monuments and oral histories. You can zoom in and out too – use the magnification tools at the top left if scrolling with your mouse wheel or touchpad proves too sensitive. The dream is that coverage for the rest of the UK might happen one day…




## HISTORIC ENGLAND ARCHIVE

w **historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/**

Historic England has one of the country's largest photographic archives, exceeding nine million images. These range from one-off albums by Victorian amateurs to the earliest surviving aerial images of England, as seen from a hot-air balloon (1882–1892), and 20,000 photos taken in the Second World War by United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) reconnaissance aircraft. Via England's Places (**historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/englands-places/**) you can explore the 'Red Box Collection' compiled by the National Buildings Record in 1941. You can zoom, rotate and click to see any details on the reverse of the image – often the building name and date.

## LONDON PICTURE ARCHIVE

w **londonpicturearchive.org.uk**

This is built around a quarter of a million photos and other images from The London Archives and Guildhall Art Gallery. They include the Cross and Tibbs series, which capture Second World War bomb damage, and the enormous London County Council Photograph Library. Searching isn't always straightforward – typing in 'Valley Road, Streatham', where I used to live, produced a host of irrelevant namesakes. However, the London Picture Map tool (**londonpicturearchive.org.uk/london-picture-map**) allows you to browse collections geographically, enabling you to zoom in on an area or street. Keep in mind that some images have not been added to the map view.

# GO FURTHER

**Nine more sites to explore your ancestor's area**

## A VISION OF BRITAIN THROUGH TIME

w **https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk**

Here you can analyse how the landscape has changed via maps searchable by postcode.

## BOROUGH PHOTOS

w **boroughphotos.org**

This London resource hosts local history images drawn from 12 borough archives.

## BRITAIN FROM ABOVE

w **https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/node**

Search thousands of aerial photos (1919–1953).

## BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY

w **balh.org.uk**

The association's website includes a directory for tracking down local history groups, whose sites often include images you can't find elsewhere.

## COFLEIN

w **https://coflein.gov.uk/en/**

This catalogue has details of sites, monuments and buildings across Wales, plus an index to the National Monuments Record of Wales archive.

## FLICKR

w **flickr.com**

Many archives and museums continue to upload streams of historic photographs to Flickr, as well as Pinterest, Instagram and Facebook.

## FRANCIS FRITH

w **francisfrith.com**

Here you can browse black-and-white photos of 8,750 UK towns and villages (1860–1970).

## HISTORYPIN

w **historypin.org/en/collections**

Explore historical stories and photographs attached to maps from across the world.

## NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

w **https://catalogue.nli.ie**

The catalogue has references to over 150,000 photos, about half of which have been digitised.

# National School Records

**Chloe O'Shea** explains how to make the most of this massive collection available on Findmypast

A collection of educational records that are of great use to family historians is exclusively available on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**). 'National School Admission Registers & Log-Books 1870–1914' (**search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/national-school-admission-registers-and-log-books-1870-1914**) contains almost 9.6 million individual entries from over 40 counties in England and Wales. Despite the name of the collection, the records actually span 1741–1953. With school attendance being mandatory for 5–10 year olds from 1880, you have a good chance of finding an ancestor in these registers.

Admission registers were not standardised, so the information found within them differs. But they all give the name of the pupil alongside the date that they joined the school. The name of a parent or guardian is recorded along with their address. This can act as a great locator for a family in between census years. Other information usually includes the name of the child's previous school, the date that they were discharged, and their reason for leaving.

## Reasons For Leaving

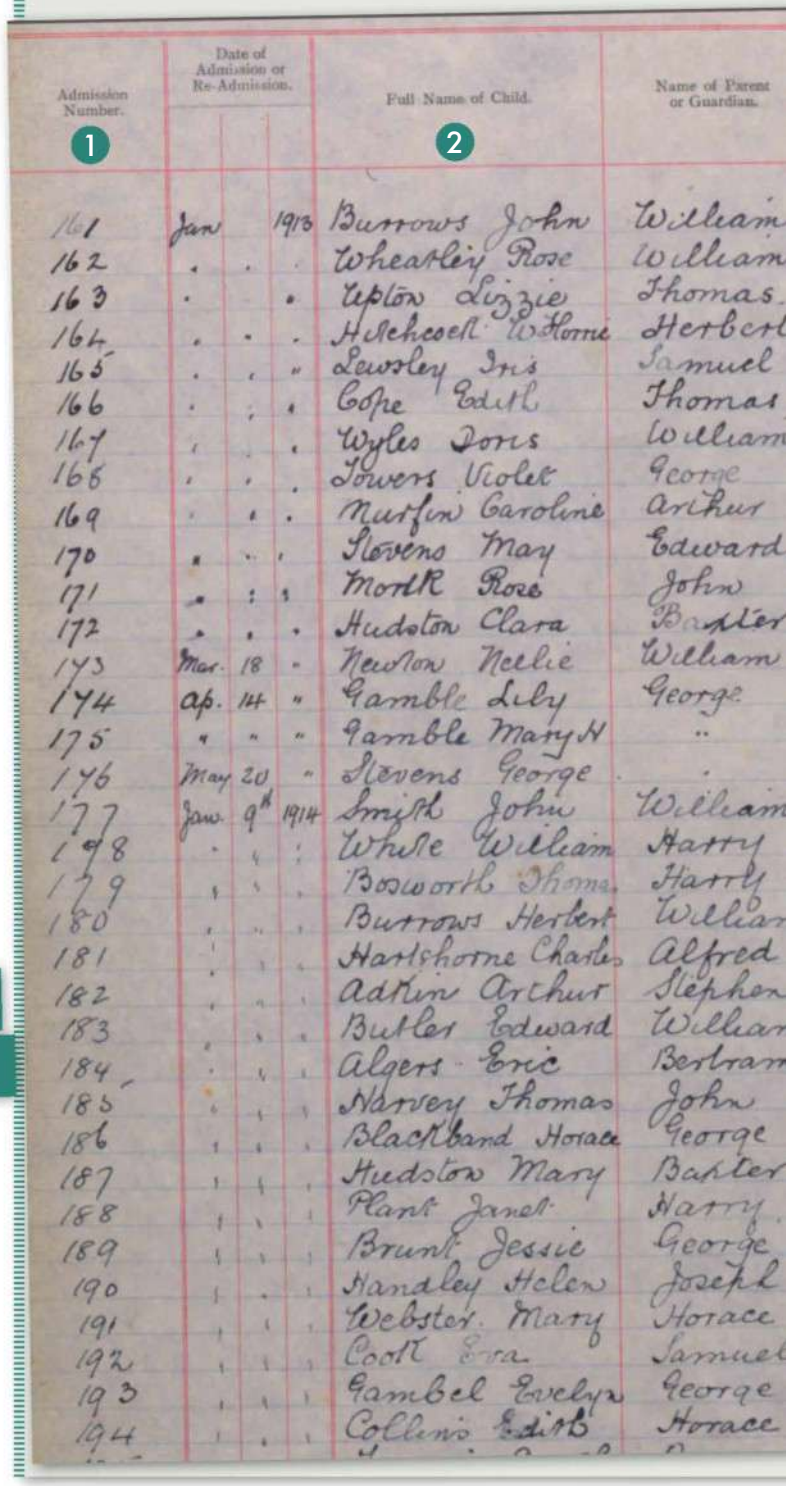
For many pupils, their reason for leaving is to move on to their next school. Other children leave under doctor's orders after illness, to move abroad or to enter the world of work. Many entries state "Labour C" as the reason. This refers to a child having passed an examination allowing them to leave school with a Labour Certificate. The reason may point you in the direction of new records, such as registers from their new school or occupational records.

Extra details found in some registers may include dates of medical inspections, the passing of examinations and a comments column. The latter is flexible and may note that they were expelled from a previous institution, or that a parent is overseas or recently deceased. In rare cases the relationship between two pupils is stated as well, such as siblings, stepsiblings or cousins.

Logbooks are daily accounts written by the head teacher, with their detail again varying from school to school. Mostly, the entries are fairly generic, giving a rough account of attendance,

**In rare cases the relationship between two pupils is stated, such as siblings or cousins**

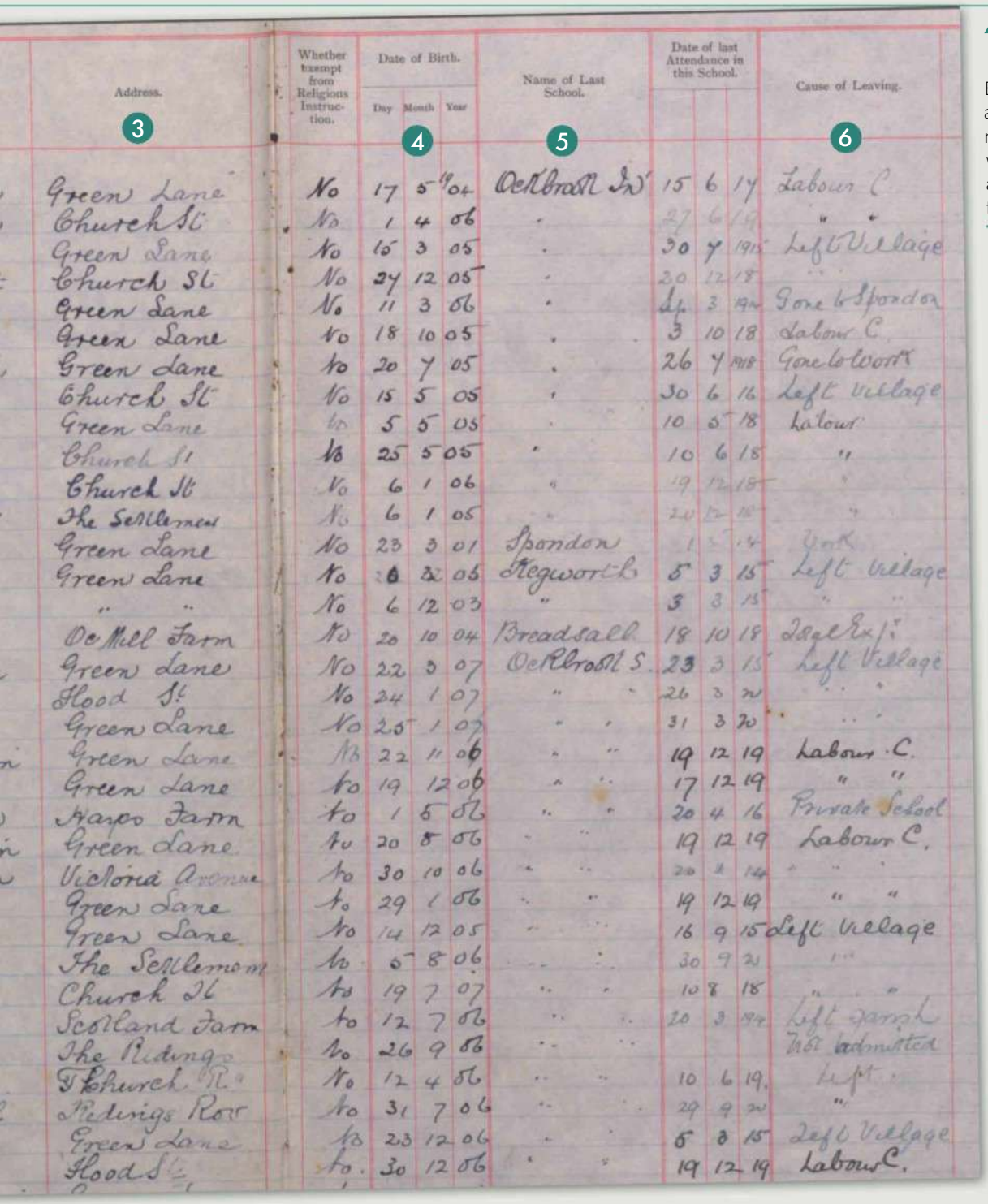
## Admission Register,



| Admission Number. 1 | Date of Admission or Re-Admission. | | | Full Name of Child. 2 | Name of Parent or Guardian. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 161 | Jan | | 1913 | Burrows John | William |
| 162 | " | " | " | Wheatley Rose | William |
| 163 | " | | " | Upton Lizzie | Thomas |
| 164 | " | " | " | Hitchcock Thorne | Herbert |
| 165 | " | " | " | Lewsley Iris | Samuel |
| 166 | " | " | " | Cope Edith | Thomas |
| 167 | " | " | " | Wyles Doris | William |
| 168 | " | " | " | Towers Violet | George |
| 169 | " | " | " | Murfin Caroline | Arthur |
| 170 | " | " | " | Stevens May | Edward |
| 171 | " | " | " | Mottr Rose | John |
| 172 | " | " | " | Hudston Clara | Barter |
| 173 | Mar. | 18 | " | Newton Nellie | William |
| 174 | Ap. | 14 | " | Gamble Lily | George |
| 175 | " | " | " | Gamble Mary H | " |
| 176 | May | 20 | " | Stevens George | |
| 177 | Jan. | 9th | 1914 | Smith John | William |
| 178 | " | " | " | White William | Harry |
| 179 | " | " | " | Bosworth Thomas | Harry |
| 180 | " | " | " | Burrows Herbert | William |
| 181 | " | " | " | Hartshorne Charles | Alfred |
| 182 | " | " | " | Adkin Arthur | Stephen |
| 183 | " | " | " | Butler Edward | William |
| 184 | " | " | " | Algers Eric | Bertram |
| 185 | " | " | " | Harvey Thomas | John |
| 186 | " | " | " | Blackband Horace | George |
| 187 | " | " | " | Hudston Mary | Barter |
| 188 | " | " | " | Plant Janet | Harry |
| 189 | " | " | " | Brunt Jessie | George |
| 190 | " | " | " | Handley Helen | Joseph |
| 191 | " | " | " | Webster Mary | Horace |
| 192 | " | " | " | Cook Eva | Samuel |
| 193 | " | " | " | Gambel Evelyn | George |
| 194 | " | " | " | Collins Edith | Horace |

# 1913–1914

This admission register from Ockbrook Redhill National School, which is preserved by Derbyshire Record Office, is available digitally through Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**)



| Address. (3) | Whether exempt from Religious Instruction. | Date of Birth. Day | Month | Year (4) | Name of Last School. (5) | Date of last Attendance in this School. | | | Cause of Leaving. (6) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Green Lane | No | 17 | 5 | 1904 | Ockbrook Sch | 15 | 6 | 14 | Labour C |
| Church St | No | 1 | 4 | 06 | " | 27 | 6 | 19 | " " |
| Green Lane | No | 15 | 3 | 05 | " | 30 | 7 | 1915 | Left Village |
| Church St | No | 24 | 12 | 05 | " | 20 | 12 | 18 | " |
| Green Lane | No | 11 | 3 | 06 | " | 4 | 3 | 19 | Gone to Spondon |
| Green Lane | No | 18 | 10 | 05 | " | 3 | 10 | 18 | Labour C. |
| Green Lane | No | 20 | 7 | 05 | " | 26 | 7 | 1918 | Gone to Work |
| Church St | No | 15 | 5 | 05 | " | 30 | 6 | 16 | Left village |
| Green Lane | No | 5 | 5 | 05 | " | 10 | 5 | 18 | Labour |
| Church St | No | 25 | 5 | 05 | " | 10 | 6 | 18 | " |
| Church St | No | 6 | 1 | 06 | " | 19 | 12 | 18 | " |
| The Settlement | No | 6 | 1 | 05 | " | 20 | 12 | 18 | " |
| Green Lane | No | 23 | 3 | 01 | Spondon | 1 | 3 | 14 | York |
| Green Lane | No | 6 | 2 | 05 | Kegworth | 5 | 3 | 15 | Left village |
| " " | No | 6 | 12 | 03 | " | 3 | 3 | 15 | " " |
| Oe Mill Farm | No | 20 | 10 | 04 | Breadsall | 18 | 10 | 18 | Dagenham |
| Green Lane | No | 22 | 3 | 07 | Ockbrook S. | 23 | 3 | 15 | Left Village |
| Flood St | No | 24 | 1 | 07 | " " | 26 | 3 | 20 | " " |
| Green Lane | No | 25 | 1 | 07 | " " | 31 | 3 | 20 | " " |
| Green Lane | No | 22 | 11 | 06 | " " | 19 | 12 | 19 | Labour C. |
| Green Lane | No | 19 | 12 | 06 | " " | 17 | 12 | 19 | " " |
| Mapo Farm | No | 1 | 5 | 06 | " " | 20 | 4 | 16 | Private School |
| Green Lane | No | 20 | 8 | 06 | " " | 19 | 12 | 19 | Labour C. |
| Victoria Avenue | No | 30 | 10 | 06 | " " | 20 | 2 | 14 | " " |
| Green Lane | No | 29 | 1 | 06 | " " | 19 | 12 | 19 | " " |
| Green Lane | No | 14 | 12 | 05 | " " | 16 | 9 | 15 | Left village |
| The Settlement | No | 5 | 8 | 06 | " " | 30 | 9 | 21 | " |
| Church St | No | 19 | 7 | 07 | " " | 10 | 8 | 18 | " " |
| Scotland Farm | No | 12 | 7 | 06 | " " | 20 | 3 | 19 | Left parish |
| The Ridings | No | 26 | 9 | 06 | " " | | | | Not admitted |
| Church St | No | 12 | 4 | 06 | " " | 10 | 6 | 19 | Left |
| Ridings Row | No | 31 | 7 | 06 | " " | 29 | 9 | 21 | " |
| Green Lane | No | 23 | 12 | 06 | " " | 5 | 8 | 15 | Left Village |
| Flood St | No | 30 | 12 | 06 | " " | 19 | 12 | 19 | Labour C. |

**1 Admission Number**
Each student was assigned an admission number when enrolling, which is shown here alongside the date that they joined the school.

**2 Full Name Of Child**
Despite the column heading, middle names may be omitted, and first names may be reduced to their initial.

**3 Address**
Street names are given in this document, but house numbers may be provided in other registers.

**4 Date Of Birth**
Each pupil's birthdate is usually accurately recorded and features in Findmypast's transcription.

**5 Name Of Last School**
The inclusion of this information can help you trace your pupil relation in other educational records.

**6 Cause Of Leaving**
The reason a pupil left the current school is shown. The examples here include departing the village, going to private school and "Labour C".

the weather and noting any visitors from that particular day. There are a huge number of examples, however, where much more detail is given, with students and teachers named. This may be noting disciplinary measures taken, exams passed, sporting achievements or illnesses.

## Poor Attendance

For example, at Clothall School in Hertfordshire in 1900–1901 we can see a wide range of useful entries within the space of a few months. Some are non-specific but interesting, such as noting poor attendance due to wet weather – not an excuse you can usually use for absence today. On 2 October 1900 the children were given the afternoon off to attend the fair in nearby Baldock.

Mr Lake called in sick on 30 October, and on 9 ▶

Young pupils at a school in London in the late 19th century

November the infants of the school were given half an hour to play as a reward for a week's perfect attendance. In December there were multiple complaints of children with severe colds, and this got worse on 10 January 1901 with pupil Nellie Hollingsworth being the school's first confirmed case of measles of the year. Unsurprisingly the disease spread at pace, with entries for the next few weeks detailing low attendance and the serious condition that several children were in.

You can also learn about traditional customs from logbooks, such as a half-day holiday being given for Valentine's Day.

## Search Advice

You can search the registers and logbooks on Findmypast by inputting your forebear's name and narrowing results down by birth year and county. You can alternatively choose to browse the logbooks to see what events were occurring while your ancestor attended a particular school.

However, it should be noted that not all records have survived, and you may find that an admission register still exists but the logbook does not. This collection is not exhaustive, with many counties omitted completely. Also, not all schools are present from the represented counties. If your relation's school does not feature in this collection, you may want to view the original records in person. These are usually held at local county archives, so search their online catalogues.

Finally, while admission registers are useful for finding specific details about an ancestor, logbooks provide a much greater context to their school life. This is relevant whether your relative was a pupil, a teacher or even a regular visitor to the school, such as the local vicar.

### TOP TIP!

When a family moved parish, the children were often enrolled into a school on the same day. So you may see siblings grouped together in an admission register.

## Resources

**Take your research further**

### BOOKS

*Basic Facts About Using Education Records*
**Colin R Chapman**
*Federation of Family History Societies, 1999*
This booklet is an excellent introduction to using school records in your research.

*Tracing Your Ancestors' Childhood*
**Sue Wilkes**
*Pen & Sword, 2013*
As well as educational records, this book looks at other aspects of childhood such as apprenticeships and home life.

### WEBSITE

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
W **nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/schools**
TNA's online research guide explains where to find related records, including inspection reports and teachers' registers.

**CHLOE O'SHEA** is a tutor for the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies (**ihgs.ac.uk**) and the author of *Tracing Your Staffordshire Ancestors* (Pen & Sword, 2025)

GETTY IMAGES

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# Q&A

Our team of experts offers tips and inspiration Edited By Claire Vaughan

Dave Annal is a genealogist, author and lecturer

Katherine Cobb is a member of AGRA based in Somerset

Alan Crosby is the editor of *The Local Historian* and our columnist

Steve Thomas is a genealogist with over 20 years' experience

Phil Tomaselli is a military family history expert and author

Alison Toplis is a dress and textile historian

Helen Whittle is a member of AGRA based in West Sussex

# How can I find out what William Smith was doing before 1893?

**Q** I can't find any information about my great grandfather, William Smith (1871–1907), before 1893. In the 1901 census, he declares himself to be William Thompson, a "Traveller CT", born in Scotland. He's living with his wife, Florence, and four-month-old son, William, at 3 Lamb's Conduit Street, London. He also went by his stage name, Carl Lebert.

They had five children. Some were born at the above address and given the surname Smith-Lebert, which is why I believe William Thompson was William Smith.

William committed suicide in 1907 (there's a story that his father did the same) and his family went into the workhouse under Florence's maiden name, Whatford.

**Bev Southgate**

**A** With such a popular name, we must explore more unusual avenues. It's a good idea to consult newspaper archives if there is evidence of a suicide. This type of event often made the news, and reporters regularly attended inquests.

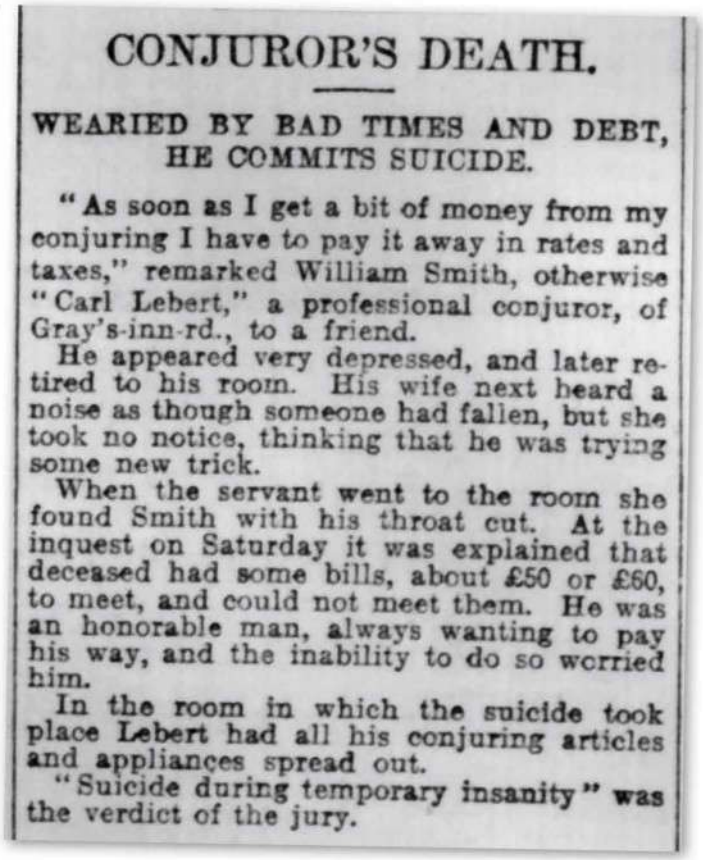
The most accessible online databases are the British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**), also available to 'Everything' subscribers to Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**), and Newspapers.com (**newspapers.com**).

A search for William Smith's birth somewhere in Scotland is a daunting task. You have a few clues, though. First, he named one of his sons John Donald, so you may expect either or both names to appear in an earlier generation. This may require searches to be made in census records at the government website Scotland's People (**scotlandspeople.gov.uk**). You'll have to pay for credits to see the images. Free transcriptions are available at FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**), but it is always advisable to view images of the records whenever possible since vital information may be mistranscribed or missed. You can use the free service to list possible targets at the pay-per-view site to keep costs down.

There's a William Smith, commercial clerk, of an appropriate age in Edinburgh who was born in Forfar. You stated that there was a family story that William's father had also committed suicide. If this was the case, then a search of newspaper archives may suggest further clues. For example, if you search the newspapers on Findmypast for the terms 'Smith' and 'Forfar suicide' you will find at least one entry for an older William Smith's suicide in 1884, as well as an article reporting on a spate of such incidents with the heading "Suicidal Mania in Forfar".

Your research will be tricky, but there are still clues to work with.

**Steve Thomas**



CONJUROR'S DEATH.

WEARIED BY BAD TIMES AND DEBT, HE COMMITS SUICIDE.

"As soon as I get a bit of money from my conjuring I have to pay it away in rates and taxes," remarked William Smith, otherwise "Carl Lebert," a professional conjuror, of Gray's-inn-rd., to a friend.

He appeared very depressed, and later retired to his room. His wife next heard a noise as though someone had fallen, but she took no notice, thinking that he was trying some new trick.

When the servant went to the room she found Smith with his throat cut. At the inquest on Saturday it was explained that deceased had some bills, about £50 or £60, to meet, and could not meet them. He was an honorable man, always wanting to pay his way, and the inability to do so worried him.

In the room in which the suicide took place Lebert had all his conjuring articles and appliances spread out.

"Suicide during temporary insanity" was the verdict of the jury.

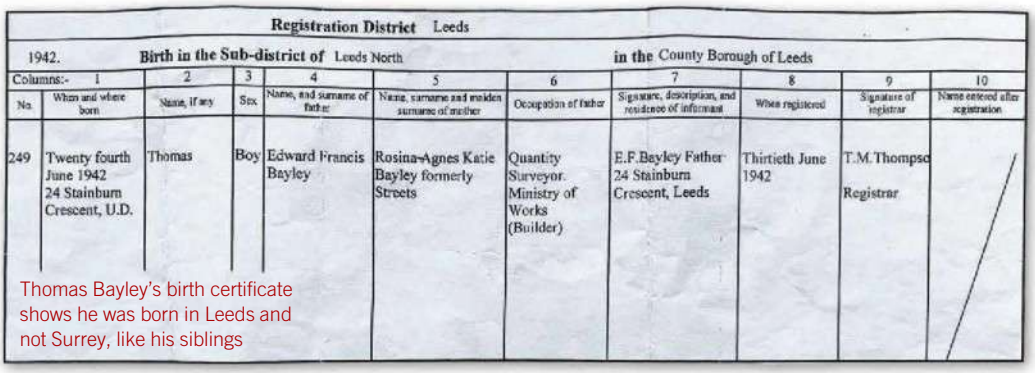
One of the newspaper articles on Findmypast about William's suicide

**HAVE YOU HIT A BRICK WALL?** Please email your questions or family photographs to the following address: **wdytyaquestions@ourmedia.co.uk**

If selected, your query will be answered on these pages. Please note that we receive a large volume of correspondence each month, and cannot reply to each message individually. You are more likely to receive a response if you keep the question and background information concise (no more than 150 words), with a clear goal of enquiry.

# Why was my builder grandfather sent to Leeds with the Home Guard during WW2?

**Q** My grandfather, Edward (Ted) Francis Bayley, was a master builder based in Surrey. He had six children – all born in Surrey between 1934 and 1948, except my uncle Thomas Bryan who was born in 1942 in Leeds. He told me that his father was part of the Home Guard, and sent to Leeds during the war because he was a builder. I'd assumed that this was a reserved occupation, so my grandfather was not required to enlist. Why might Home Guard builders have been sent around the country?
**Rowan Bayley**



Registration District Leeds

1942. Birth in the Sub-district of Leeds North in the County Borough of Leeds

| Columns:- 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. | When and where born | Name, if any | Sex | Name, and surname of father | Name, surname and maiden surname of mother | Occupation of father | Signature, description, and residence of informant | When registered | Signature of registrar | Name entered after registration |
| 249 | Twenty fourth June 1942 24 Stainburn Crescent, U.D. | Thomas | Boy | Edward Francis Bayley | Rosina Agnes Katie Bayley formerly Streets | Quantity Surveyor. Ministry of Works (Builder) | E.F.Bayley Father 24 Stainburn Crescent, Leeds | Thirtieth June 1942 | T.M.Thompso Registrar | |

Thomas Bayley's birth certificate shows he was born in Leeds and not Surrey, like his siblings

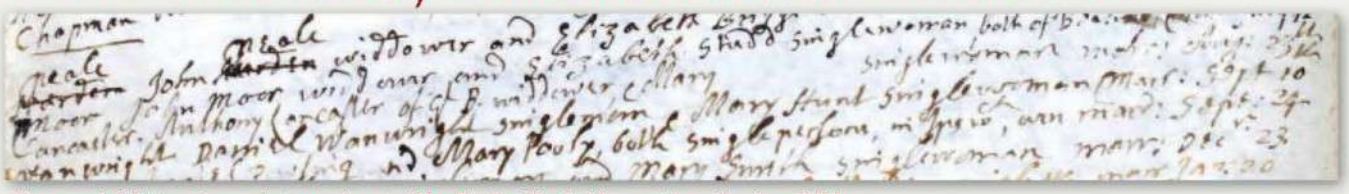
**A** If Ted volunteered for the Home Guard when it formed in May 1940, he'd have joined a local platoon as part of a county battalion, living at home (with uniform and weapons kept safely there), probably 23rd Battalion (Home Guard) the Queen's Royal Regiment, based in Croydon. Platoons contained a mix of men aged 17–65 (older men did sneak in), but there were no construction or repair units.

In 1942, it was decided to conscript men into the Home Guard to replace trained soldiers in anti-aircraft units. Conscripts could be sent where needed, and the Ministry of Labour conscripted many who were previously in reserved occupations. There were particular shortages in Yorkshire, and Ted (and family) may have moved there. When the Home Guard stood down in late 1944, they probably returned home.

Individual Home Guard records are held by The National Archives (TNA) at Kew, obtainable using a Freedom of Information request. Ted was born in 1903, so the online form you need is at **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mod-open-foi-request-step1**. TNA should tell you within 20 working days whether it holds his record, but it may take a year before you receive a copy. There'll probably be an admin charge (you'll be advised of this in advance). Home Guard records aren't too detailed, but should mention which unit(s) he served in and where.

Some unit records are at TNA in series WO 199 (not digitised), others are held more locally.
**Phil Tomaselli**

# What was Mary Lancaster's maiden name?



The record of Anthony Lancaster's marriage to "Mary" in the Woodbridge parish register from 1711

**Q** I'm descended from Anthony Lancaster (born 1714 in Great Bealings, Suffolk), the son of Anthony Lancaster. I believe his mother was called Mary, since the Woodbridge parish register shows that Anthony Lancaster, widower of Great Bealings, married Mary, a single woman, in Woodbridge in 1711. Unfortunately, it doesn't give her maiden name and I cannot find banns or a marriage licence. Anthony Lancaster senior's will, proved in 1737, holds no clues.

Family trees I've found online name Mary as Mary Wells of Guilden Morden, Cambridgeshire. However, I'm not convinced.
**Judith Parker**

**A** Like you, I am unconvinced that Mary was Mary Wells of Guilden Morden. It seems improbable that Anthony's bride would have come from a parish 70 miles away. However, before dismissing Mary Wells completely, I suggest researching her a little. Is there a marriage or burial for her at Guilden Morden? Did her father leave a will that includes her married name?

The marriage entry is unusual, in that the surname is not illegible but missing. Since entries were sometimes written in a rough book before being copied into the register, check whether one exists for Woodbridge, and whether the Bishop's Transcript has survived, as these may mention her surname.

If Mary came from an affluent family, a marriage settlement may have been drawn up which would include Mary's maiden name and probably her father's name. Try Suffolk Archives' catalogue (**www.suffolkarchives.co.uk**); settlements are usually catalogued under the groom's name.

Married women were often referred to by their full name in their father's will, but tracing a will is tricky if her maiden name is unknown. Indexes of wills' beneficiaries exist for a few counties; Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) has one for Suffolk created by the family history society, but it's a work in progress and currently covers 1847–1857. You could check the wills of testators from Woodbridge or Great Bealings in the hope of finding Mary's father's will, but it would be time-consuming and might not pay off.
**Katherine Cobb**

## Picture Analysis

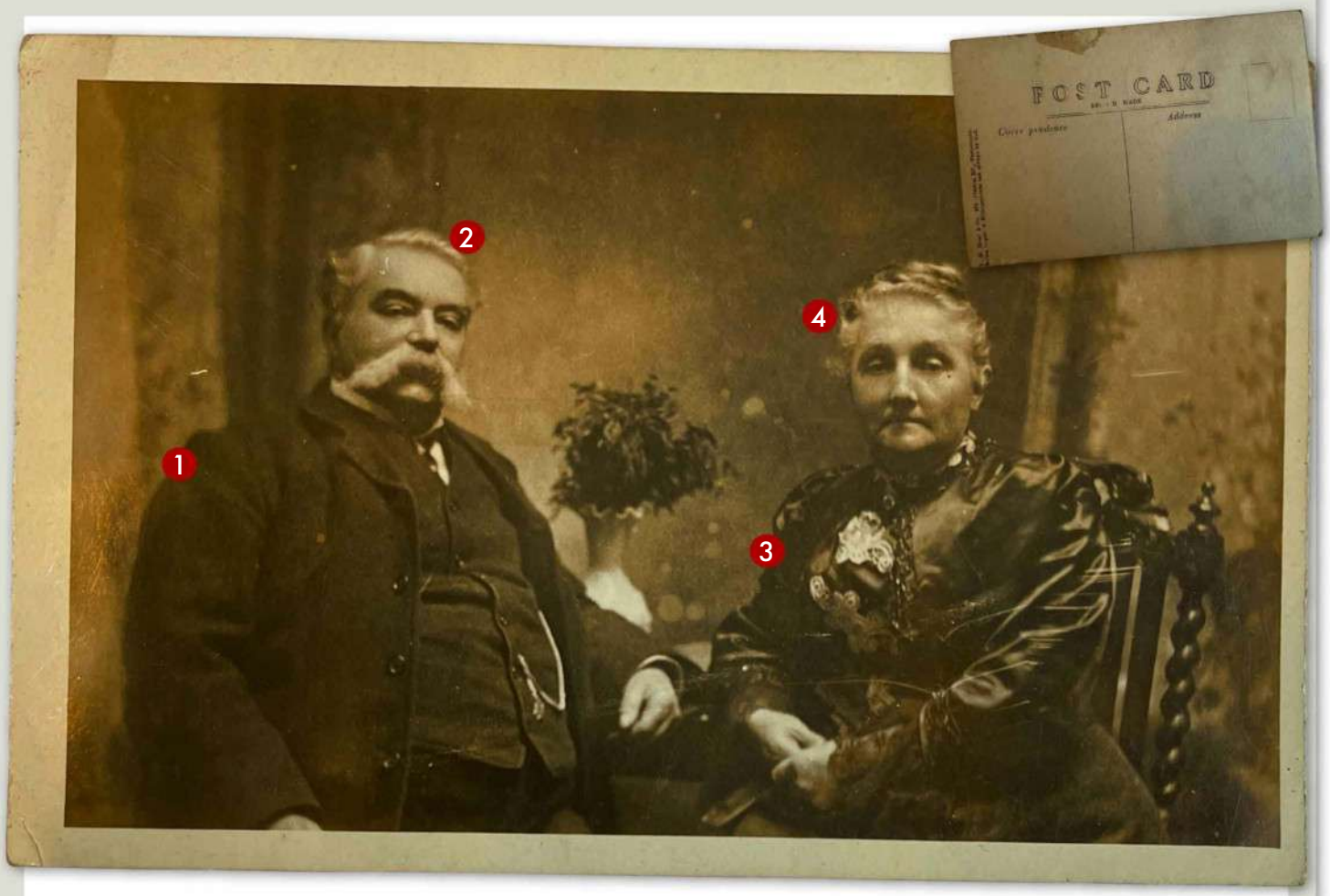
# Can you help me identify this couple?

**Q** I'm looking for help dating this postcard, which I inherited many years ago, because I've never been able to identify who the depicted ancestors are.
**Hazel Flint**

**A** The maturity of these sitters makes this a difficult image to date through their clothing, because the styles they are wearing don't reflect contemporary fashions. However, there are clues on the reverse of the postcard that can help to pin down a date.

The divided back of the postcard gives a post-1902 date, and the simpler instructions, as people became used to sending postcards, indicate that it was taken after 1910. As far as I can ascertain, the photographers, Head & Co., worked at the address on the postcard between 1899 and 1918, giving an approximately eight-year window for this image. The feel of the studio backdrop suggests it was taken before the First World War.

The woman's satin dress reaches back into the Victorian period for its style details. Such plain outfits, in two pieces, were often worn by older women as a more conservative option. However, the satin, along with the lace at the cuffs and on the high neckline, as well as the appliqué embroidered decoration on the bodice, add to the sense of occasion. I would tentatively suggest a date for this image of between 1910 and 1914, the couple perhaps photographed for a major wedding anniversary.
**Alison Toplis**




### 1 LOUNGE SUIT

The man wears a three-piece lounge suit with a watch chain, popular since the late 19th century. While the knotted tie had overtaken the bow tie, the winged collar was conservative for this date.

### 2 MAN'S HAIRSTYLE

The rather magnificent moustache and side parting also hark back to the last couple of decades of the 19th century in contrast to the clean-shaven, centrally parted hair displayed by the fashionable younger man of the 1910s.

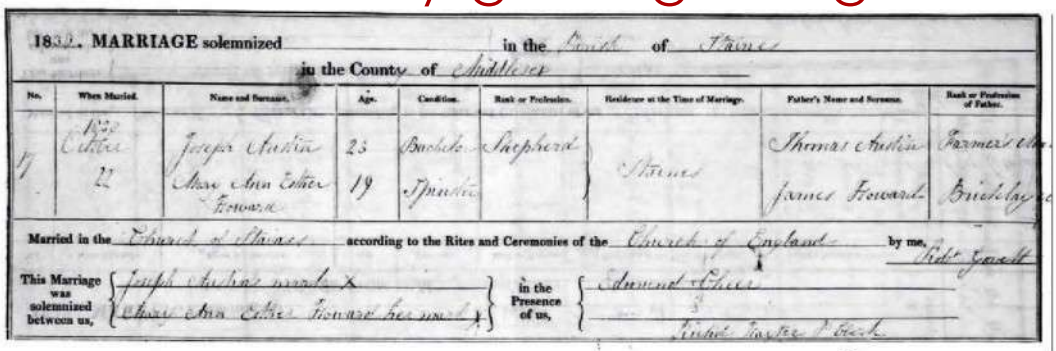
### 3 DRESS SLEEVES

The woman's sleeves echo the loose puff fashion of the early 1890s, a style that remained popular into the Edwardian period for older women.

### 4 WOMAN'S HAIRSTYLE

This type of severe hairstyle, where the hair is drawn up into a coiled chignon on the top of the head, was popular with our female forebears during the late 1880s and the early 1890s.

# When was my great great grandfather born?


1838. MARRIAGE solemnized in the Parish of Staines in the County of Middlesex

| No. | When Married. | Name and Surname. | Age. | Condition. | Rank or Profession. | Residence at the Time of Marriage. | Father's Name and Surname. | Rank or Profession of Father. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17 | Oct 22 | Joseph Austin | 23 | Bachelor | Shepherd | Staines | Thomas Austin | Farmer's Man |
| | | Mary Ann Esther Howard | 19 | Spinster | | | James Howard | Bricklayer |

Married in the Church of Staines according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England by me, Robt Jowett

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Joseph Austin his mark X, Mary Ann Esther Howard her mark X

in the Presence of us, Edmund Chew, Lindal Foster & Clerk

Helen's tracked down this record of the marriage of Joseph Austin on 22 October 1838 – is this Graham's forebear?

**Q** I can't find the birth record for my great great grandfather, Joseph Austin, nor can I get his marriage and death dates to fit.

So far I have these possibilities. Joseph Austin, born 26 December 1819, parents Thomas and Ann, Bermondsey Street, father: baker; Joseph Austin, aged 23, married Mary Ann Esther Howard, 19, on 20 October 1835, Staines, Surrey, fathers: Thomas Austin and James Howard.

Joseph emigrated to South Australia in 1839. The documents mention James Wigley's farm. Joseph died on 23 January 1879 (aged 61/62) in Athelstone, City of Campbelltown, South Australia, so born 1817.

**Graham Austin**

**A** This is a challenge. There are several Joseph Austin baptisms in Kent around the right period, but I don't think any of them are what we're looking for.

I think I've ruled out your Joseph being the son of Thomas Austin the baker of Bermondsey. I found a Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) will for Thomas proved on 20 October 1848. He mentions three daughters and three sons George, John and James, but there is no mention of a Joseph. Although it's possible that Joseph received his portion before emigration, this would usually be mentioned in the will.

Looking into James Wigley's farm, The National Archives' catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**) revealed various mentions and a will for a James Wigley, yeoman of Staines, Middlesex, proved 25 March 1839. Sadly the beneficiaries are nephews and great nephews, but the date may be significant.

I also think the marriage date of 1835 is wrong. Instead, I found: on 22 October 1838, Joseph Austin, age 23, bachelor, shepherd of Staines, father Thomas Austin, farmer's man, married Mary Ann Esther Howard, age 19, spinster, father James Howard, bricklayer.

I can't find a baptism for Joseph, but there are families of Austins on the 1841 census at Harmondsworth and East Bedfont that are worth looking into.

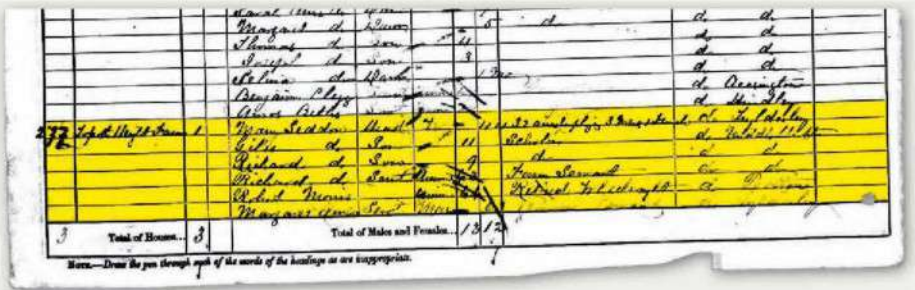
**Helen Whittle**

**TOP TIP** If you have more than one candidate for an ancestor in the records, you need to investigate all clues, including other family members, to check that the record is for your ancestor. Build trees for families with the same name in the area.

# How do I find out what happened to Giles Seddon?

**Q** I'm trying to find my ancestor Giles Seddon (born 20 October 1869, Bolton), whose parents were Nathaniel Seddon (a farmer) and Mary Andrews. He is with them on the 1871 census and his widowed mother only in the 1881 census at Top O' The Height Farm. The only other mention of him is in his mother's will dated 22 November 1890, when he was living at 1 Glynne Street, Moses Gate, Farnworth. He isn't there in 1891.

**Sue Gooden**


Total of Houses... 3 Total of Males and Females... 13 12

In 1881 Sue's elusive forebear Giles Seddon was living with his widowed mother Mary

**A** When somebody apparently disappears, there are several things to consider. One possibility is a misspelling of the surname, so make use of any 'variant spelling' facility when carrying out searches. The individual could have been simply omitted from a census in error, so it would be prudent to check the subsequent census, 10 years later, just in case. I looked for Giles in 1901 and 1911 with no luck. I also checked the 1939 Register – Giles would have been 70, so could easily have still been alive – but, again, I couldn't find him.

So had he died? The General Register Office's (GRO's) death indexes don't have anybody of the right age or geographical location, except a Giles who died in 1932 at Walkden near Bolton and left a will. The GRO index gives his age as 73; thus he was born in 1859, so too old to be your man, but it might be worth having a look at the will to rule him out. Check any local indexes to births, marriages or deaths, baptisms or burials. I searched the OnLine Parish Clerks database for Lancashire (**lan-opc.org.uk**), without success. Perhaps Giles emigrated? I looked through passenger lists on the subscription websites, but couldn't find him.

Newspapers often provide clues as well. I found quite a few entries in Bolton titles between 1890 and 1910. None relate to the Giles we want, but some could be members of his wider family. Maybe he changed his name in order that he wouldn't be found.

**Alan Crosby**

# Big Question

# Where did my great grandmother go after 1915?

**Q** I need help tracking down my great grandmother, Eliza Elizabeth Yates (born 7 June 1884, West Bromwich), after 1915. She married Arthur Carpenter in 1905 in West Bromwich and had Emma, my grandmother (1906–1998), and Ada (1908–1969). During my research, I discovered they also had Alice (born 1912) and Lily May (born 1915). Arthur is recorded as single on the 1921 census, and widowed on the 1939 Register. On his army papers, he gives his mother's name as next of kin.

Can you tell me what happened to Eliza and the two unknown daughters, who were never spoken about in the family?

**Lynne Wilkins**

**A** Birthdates can be a useful problem-solving tool when it comes to tracking down 'disappearing' ancestors. With sources such as school admission registers, post-1969 English/Welsh death certificates, and (most important of all) the 1939 Register, we can often find people using just their date of birth – even if they were using an assumed name.

In this case, I have been unable to find a promising record for your great grandmother in the 1939 Register, which might suggest that she had died before it was taken, but she could also be there listed under a different name. I was, however, able to find her two younger daughters, Alice and Lily May.

Alice Carpenter was living in Wistaston, Cheshire, working as a domestic servant. Her surname has been amended to Jones, which ties in with the marriage of Alice Carpenter to Wilfred Jones registered in the Crewe district in 1941.

Wilfred was a teacher and the wedding was reported in the *Crewe Chronicle* of 31 May 1941. It's interesting to note that Alice was given away by a man named "JH Lea", and that there's no mention of anyone named Carpenter or Yates in the list of guests.

Wilfred seems to have died in 2000; his death certificate may provide some clues as to what happened to Alice.

I can't find Alice or her mother in the 1921 census, but I was able to find Lily May, listed as an inmate in the West Bromwich Workhouse School at Wigmore. She was six years old and the census tells us that her mother was alive, but that her father was "not known".

Moving forward to 1939, we find Lily May in a different institution. She was now a patient in the Great Barr Park Colony, later St Margaret's Mental Hospital. Lily's surname has been 'updated' in the register to Jenkins, but the only possible marriage I can find is to a man called Joseph Ernest Moore, registered in the Oldbury district in 1947. He had been a fellow inmate of the asylum at Great Barr. Joseph died in Birmingham in 1969, but it appears that he may have been divorced from Lily May.

If Eliza Elizabeth was still alive in 1921, as the census suggests, then where was she, and where was Alice? Alice should, in theory, be quite easy to trace – there aren't too many nine year olds called Alice, born in West Bromwich – but if she's there, I can't see her. Her mother, with her far more common first name(s), is naturally going to be harder to find and, again, I can't see an obvious candidate.

The 1939 Register includes details of 47 women called Eliza/Elizabeth (or similar) who were born on 7 June 1884. It would be possible to look at each of them in detail to see whether they could be your great grandmother, but it won't be an easy task.

There are, however, plenty of clues to follow up. Hopefully one of them will help you to discover what happened to Eliza. I suggest obtaining the marriage certificates for the two daughters, and looking at the records of the Wigmore School (available at Walsall Archives; **go.walsall.gov.uk/walsall-libraries/lichfield-street-hub/walsall-archives-services**) to see what they might tell us about Lily May and her mother.

**Dave Annal**

CREWE TEACHER'S WEDDING

JONES—CARPENTER

The wedding took place at Crewe Green Church on Saturday of Miss Alice Carpenter, of Wistaston, and Mr. Wilfred Jones, a local school teacher, and son of Mr. and Mrs. E. Jones, Spring Gardens, Crewe.

The ceremony was performed by the Rev. H. Collins, and the hymns were "Thine for ever," God of Love" and "Come, Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost." Mr. T. Cooke was the organist.

The bride, given away by Mr. J. H. Lea, wore a gown of figured satin with train, her veil being held by a coronet of white gardenias; she carried a bouquet of red roses. The bridesmaids—Miss Winifred Pear and Miss Stella M. Lea—wore dresses of wine marocain, with headdresses to match, and amethyst necklaces, the gift of the bridegroom; each carried a bouquet of anemones.

Mr. W. Mostyn Peers was best man and Messrs. Roscoe and Reade were groomsmen. The mother of the bridegroom wore a grey ensemble, with a spray of flesh pink carnations.

The reception was held at the Crewe Arms Hotel, the guests including Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Storey, Mrs. J. H. Lea, Mr. and Mrs. T. Owen, Mr. and Mrs. Lawton, Mrs. Chatfield, Mrs. Price, Miss Price, Mr. and Mrs. B. Roscoe, Mr. and Mrs. G. Roscoe, Mr. N. Hurst, Miss Piggott, and Mr. Evans.

Later the bride and bridegroom left for North Wales, the bride wearing a grey two-piece with navy accessories.

A newspaper report of Eliza's daughter Alice's wedding

**LYNNE WILKINS'** great grandmother Eliza seems to vanish from the records

# What regiment was James Athey Hunt in during WW1?

**Q** My great uncle, James Athey Hunt (here seated on the left), was from Stockton-on-Tees and would have been 18 in February 1916. He was at Salisbury Plain during the First World War, but I have no idea of the regiment or what he may have done there. I believe the photo was taken in Amesbury.
**Anne Courtney**

**A** This is a studio photograph of newly trained soldiers, probably from Bulford Camp near Amesbury, Wiltshire, taken in Mr Boak's studio in the town. Your great uncle wears the uniform of a Royal Engineers sapper (equivalent to a private).

There are a lot of James (or James A) Hunts who served in the First World War, but some can be dismissed quickly. James A Hunt, driver, 794, Royal Field Artillery then Royal Engineers, 246979, was awarded the 1914/15 Star, so served during 1915 (too early). James Hunt (319411, Royal Engineers) was 47 (too old). I can find no service record or Medal Index Card (MIC) that is definitely for James Athey Hunt.

On both the 1911 and 1921 censuses and the 1939 Register, he's a railway fitter. Although the Army was occasionally mocked for sending men to inappropriate units, it generally got things right. Since he was an experienced railway fitter, it's possible James was sent to a railway training depot to teach new recruits, and never went abroad himself – so therefore has no MIC.

If you want to look for yourself, search Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) or Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) for J or JA Hunt and Royal Engineers. You may find someone I've missed.
**Phil Tomaselli**

## 1 CAP BADGES

James' cap badge is that of the Royal Engineers: a wreath surrounding the Royal Arms, a crown above, the motto "Honi soit qui mal y pense", and "Royal Engineers" on a scroll below. James' colleagues wear different badges, which suggests that they've just completed basic military training and are about to be sent to their regiments.

## 2 SHOULDER TITLE

On his right shoulder, James wears a metallic shoulder title of two letters – "RE" – so he's a Royal Engineer.

## 3 LANYARD

The lanyard just visible on James' left shoulder supports him being a Royal Engineer, but other units also wore lanyards, so more evidence is needed.

## 4 JACKET POCKETS

They all have pleated jacket pockets and pre-1917 collars.

## 5 PHOTOGRAPHER

The 1913 *Kelly's Directory of the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire* puts photographer James Boak in Redcar. Perhaps the lure of so many soldiers to photograph made him move; he was still in Amesbury in 1921.

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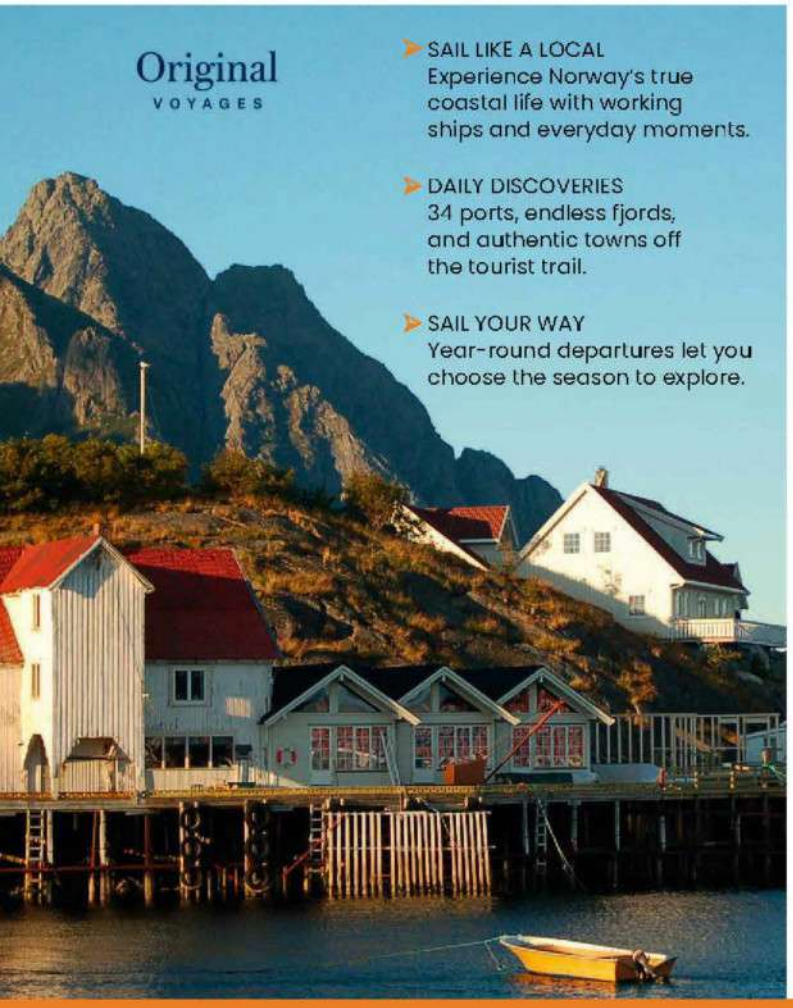

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# Lost In Leavesden

**Rosemary Collins** learns about a project researching forgotten asylum patients

The volunteers who carried out the association's survey in January 2020

Leavesden Country Park in Hertfordshire was once the site of several institutions: Leavesden Asylum, later known as Leavesden Hospital (in operation between 1870 and 1995), St Pancras Orphanage (1870–1930), the Canadian Hospital (1939–1947), Abbots Langley General Hospital (1947–1985) and the Springfield Special Needs School (1976–1985). The Leavesden Hospital History Association (LHHA; **leavesdenhospital.org**), which was founded by Martin Brooks, is dedicated to preserving the history of these institutions which touched so many lives.

Leavesden Hospital's original cemetery, on the south side of East Lane, closed in 1905 and is now inaccessible. A new cemetery opened on the north side in 1908.

In January 2020, a group of 15 volunteers from the association carried out an archaeological survey of the north-side cemetery. They unearthed 510 cremation markers that had sunk below ground level, relating to patients and staff who had died, been cremated and whose ashes had been buried there.

They also found 65 headstones. With support from Three Rivers District Council, they were able to identify and repair the markers and headstones, and put some headstones that had been moved back in their original place.

The next step was to carry out genealogical research into the individuals buried in the cemetery. The LHHA has now compiled a 'Register of Names' of people who were buried there, as well as hospital staff who died in the world wars and are commemorated on a plaque. Gill Durrell, the volunteer leading the research, used surviving records held by Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (**www.hertfordshirearchives.org.uk**) and The London Archives (**www.thelondonarchives.org**), in addition to public records such as the census.

The Register of Names captures the often poignant details of a time when people with learning difficulties and mental illness had no support other than being placed in institutions. There are many people on the register who are described in census records as "imbeciles" or "lunatics".

There are also dark hints of historic crimes in the records. For example, they show that Caroline Ansell was buried in the cemetery, although she doesn't have a memorial. Caroline was born in 1874, and committed to the asylum because of her epilepsy. In 1899, she died after eating a cake that had been sent to her. The police learnt that her sister Mary had taken out a life-insurance policy on her and sent her the poisoned cake, hoping to claim the insurance money. Mary was hanged for murder.

Aaron Kosminski, who was one of the suspects in the Jack the Ripper murders, was also committed to Leavesden Asylum in later life and died there, although he isn't buried in the East Lane cemetery.

**The LHHA has compiled a 'Register of Names' of people buried in the cemetery**

In 2021, another headstone was found in the cemetery. It belonged to an under nurse at the asylum called Edith Jane Offer, who died in 1929. Then in 2025 a resident of Abbots Langley discovered a headstone in their garden belonging to another inmate – Charles James Moody, who died in 1919. One of the project volunteers, Emma Frost, helped Martin collect and reinstall his headstone.

Martin welcomes inquiries from relations of those who died in the asylum. "Remembering those who have passed away, especially relatives, helps us to remember those people who made us who we are. It allows us to honour their legacies, find comfort in their passing, and connects us to our communities and our past," he explains.

STEPHEN DANZIG

## Discover More

**Leavesden Hospital History Association**
w **leavesdenhospital.org**

You can view the Register of Names at **leavesdenhospital.org/east-lane-cemetery/**. Martin is keen to track down the lost Book of Remembrance from the Leavesden Hospital Chapel of the Good Shepherd. If you have any information about the book or the individuals who were buried in the cemetery, please email *leavesdenhospitalhistory@gmail.com*.

**TELL YOUR STORY**

**Share your local history project with us and you could appear in the magazine!**

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *rosemary.collins@ourmedia.co.uk*

# THE BIG PICTURE

Celebrating our ancestors caught on camera

GETTY IMAGES

# The Orphans' Performance

**Children dressed as penguins rehearse for a pantomime based on *Robinson Crusoe* at Langley Hall in Buckinghamshire on 29 December 1936**

Since 1942 the Radio 4 series *Desert Island Discs* has interviewed the great and the good about their lives, and discovered the eight audio recordings that they would like to take if they were cast away on a desert island, as well as a choice of book and a "luxury item".

But when Robinson Crusoe was stranded on *his* island, in Daniel Defoe's eponymous 1719 novel, he was understandably more worried about sustenance and survival than entertainment. Fortunately, on one of the beaches he came across "an infinite number of Fowls, of many Kinds, some which I had seen, and some which I had not seen of before, and many of them very good Meat; but such as I knew not the Names of, except those call'd *Penguins*".

In 1896 Kittie Carson, whose husband edited the industry newspaper *The Stage*, was also concerned about survival… but not her own. Five years earlier she had founded the Theatrical Ladies' Guild, a charity supporting women in the industry. Now she turned her attention to boarding, clothing and educating the destitute children of performers, some of whom had lost both their parents.

Carson set up the Actors' Orphanage Fund as a result, and legendary actor-manager Sir Henry Irving, its founding president, helped the charity raise the money to place children in orphanages or with foster families. In 1906 the fund opened its own orphanage in Croydon, before moving to a country house in Langley in 1915. Langley Place (later renamed Hall) had a theatre, where the children put on a pantomime every Christmas; they also took their 1936 production of *Robinson Crusoe* to the Gaiety Theatre in London's West End.

Unfortunately much of the charity's archive no longer exists, but you can learn more about its fascinating history on the website of its modern incarnation ACT: the Actors' Children's Trust (**actorschildren.org**).

# Make the most of family photos with a free app

The free app digiKam can help you organise and search scanned images, says **Nick Peers**

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. In the case of digital photos, that's especially true, because image files can contain far more than just the photo itself. You can embed all kinds of useful information – title, date, place, keyword tags and even facial-recognition data – which can then be accessed in other apps, including your online tree.

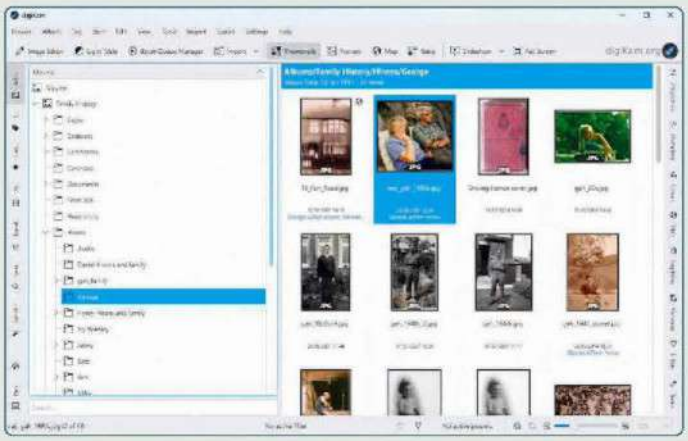
Managing this information – never mind your photos – is the tricky part. But thanks to the brilliant (and completely free) tool digiKam, which runs on Windows, macOS and Linux, you can bring all your photos together to view, edit and organise as you see fit. Start by visiting **digikam.org** and clicking 'Download' to save the installer to your computer.

After installing, a welcome wizard will run. Click 'Next' at the first screen, then select the folder inside which all your photos reside. Click 'Next', tick 'Enable WAL mode…' for stability purposes, then click 'Next' again. Ignore the next step by clicking 'Next', then select 'Add information to files' to record your metadata in the files themselves, allowing them to be read in other programs too.

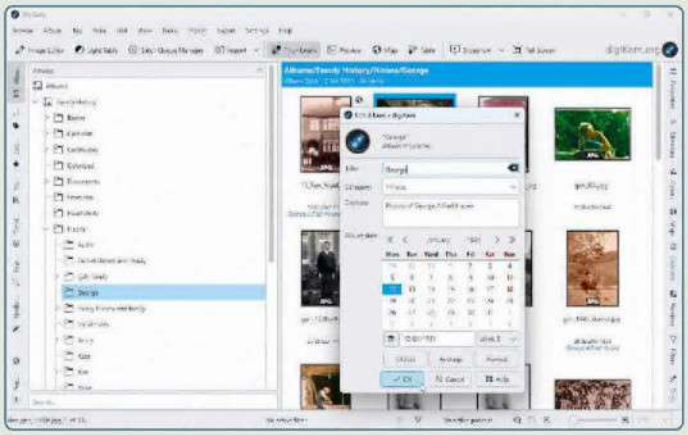
After downloading the required extra files, close and restart digiKam. You're now ready to start cataloguing your photos.

**TOP TIP!**

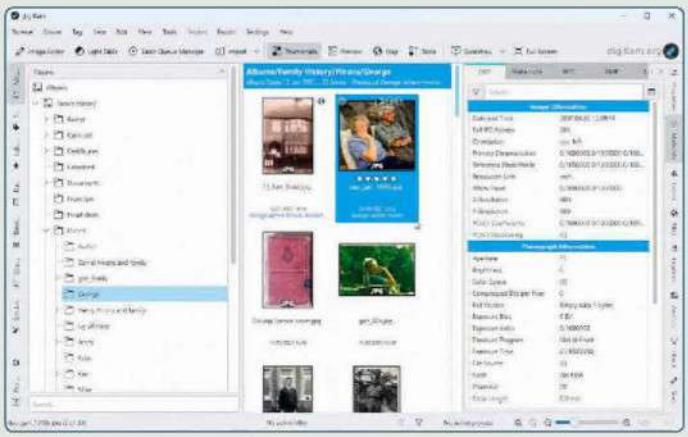
As with all facial-recognition software, digiKam's matching capabilities will improve with experience, so start by training it on some clearly defined faces.



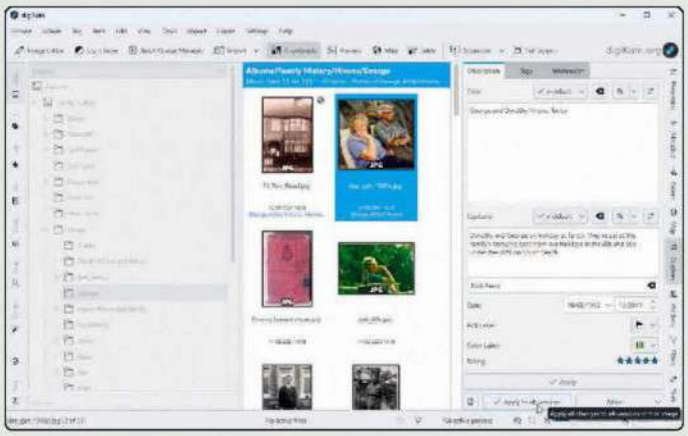
**1 Take Your First Steps** When you open digiKam for the first time after setting it up, you'll see a three-paned window with tabs running vertically on the left and right. Let's start with the left-hand pane, which is used for navigation. Click 'Albums', which displays your photos in a folder-like structure.



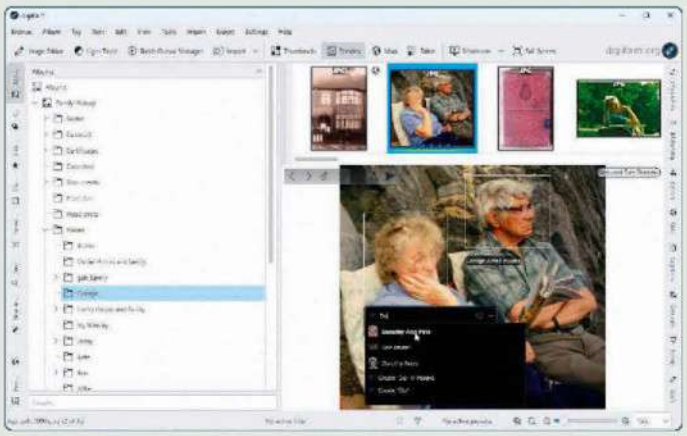
**2 Organise Your Albums** By default, Albums mirrors your Pictures folder's own folder structure, so there's no need to create new folders. Instead, you can add extra properties – a caption, date or category for example – by right-clicking an album title in the left-hand pane and choosing 'Properties'.



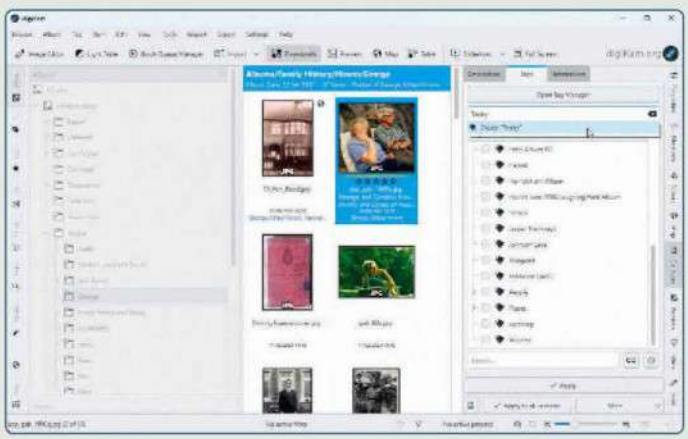
**3 View Your Photos** When selected, the contents of an album/folder are displayed in the middle pane. You'll see thumbnails of each photo, plus any tags or dates you may have previously assigned in other software. The selected photo's properties are shown in the right-hand pane under the 'Metadata' tab.



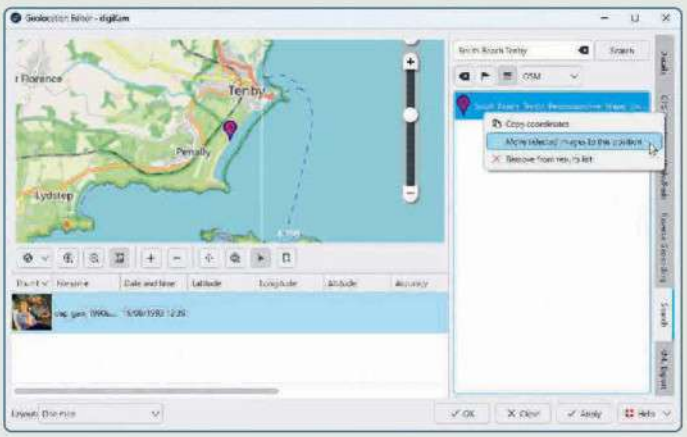
**4 Add Descriptive Detail** Select 'Captions' from the right-hand tab bar to give the photo a title and caption, plus change its date to more closely reflect the date of the original photo if necessary. Beneath this are options to assign colour labels to your images based on your own criteria (eg red for 'Unidentified').



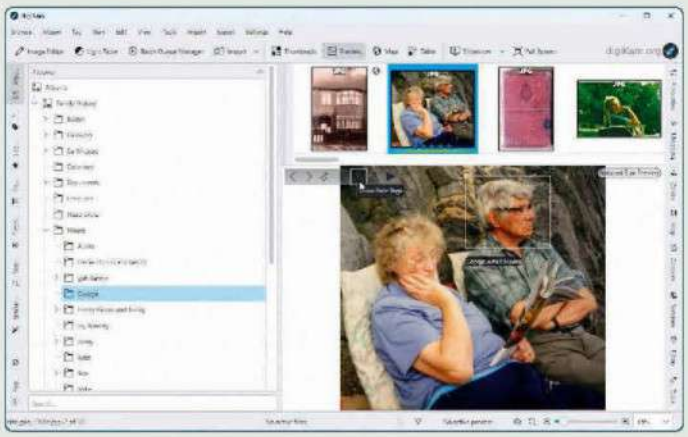
**7 Identify A Face Manually** If a face hasn't been identified, click the 'Add A Face Tag' button. Draw a square around the person's head and then enter their name – previously identified names will pop up, allowing you to save time by clicking one, or you can simply type the name and click 'Confirm' to create a new tag.



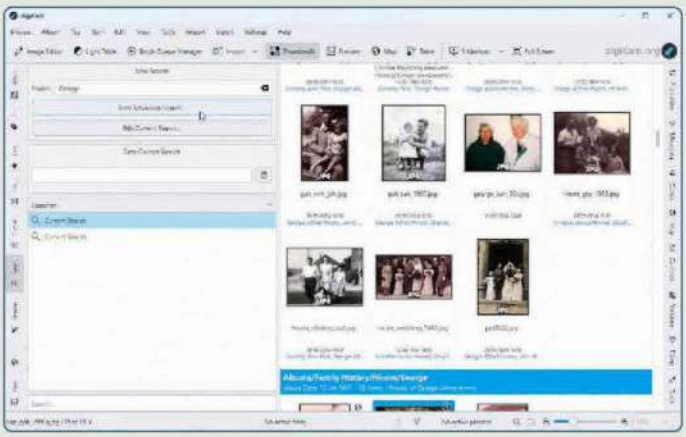
**5 Add Keyword Tags** You can also tag your photos with descriptive keywords – for example, with a date, place or event type (such as 'World War I'). Switch to the 'Tags' tab at the top of the 'Captions' pane where you can create new ones and select previously used tags (including those created in other software).



**8 Add Geotags** If you know where a photograph was taken, choose 'Item > Edit GeoLocation'. Select 'Search' from the right-hand vertical tabs and enter part or all of the address to start searching. When the correct place is found, right-click it and choose 'Move selected images to this position' followed by 'Apply' or 'OK'.



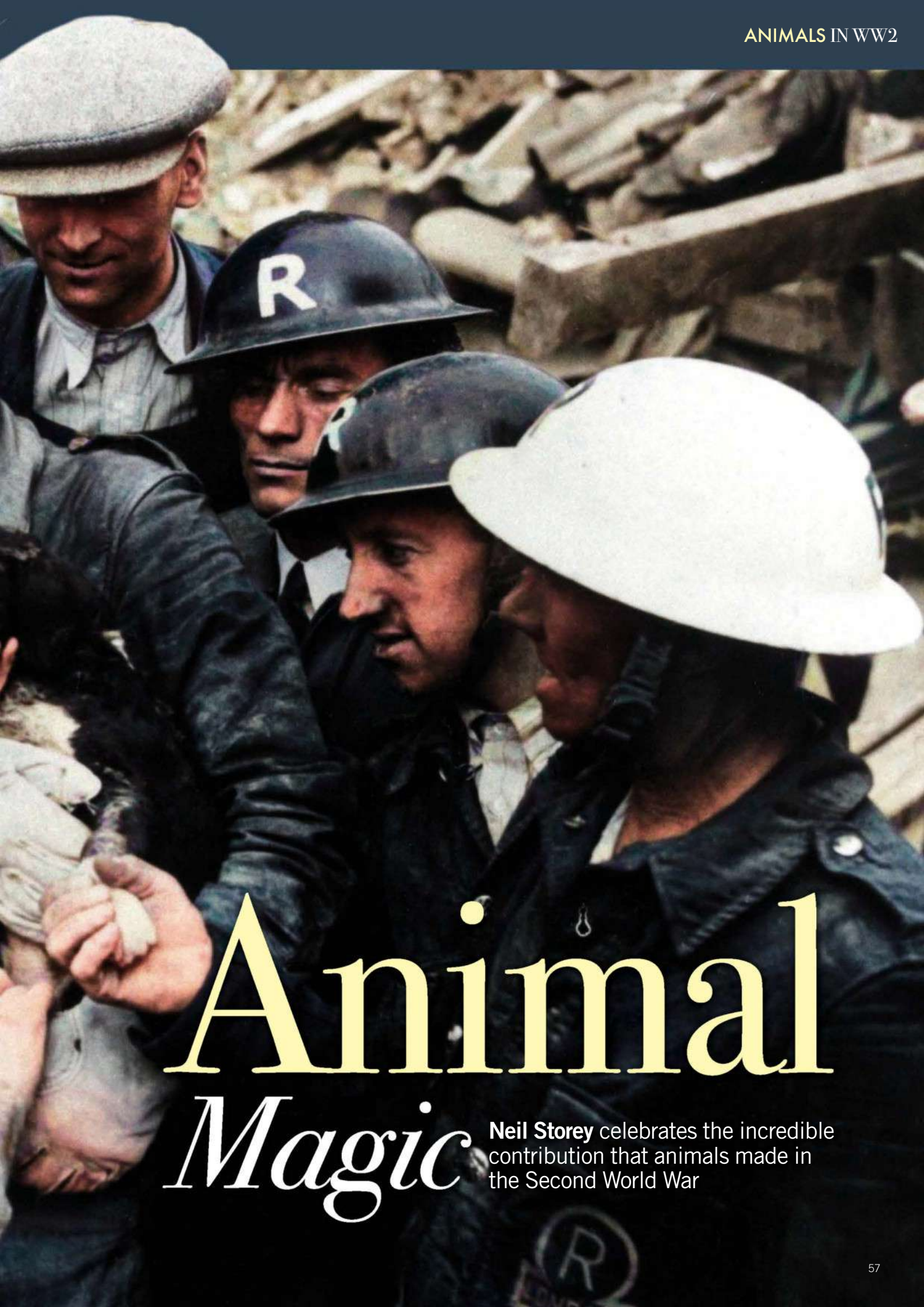
**6 Perform Facial Recognition** You can run facial recognition on individual photos or entire albums. Double-click the photo to bring up a larger thumbnail, with a series of buttons across the top. Previously tagged photos from programs like Google Photos should retain these – click the 'Show Face Tag' button to view any current tags.



**9 Keep Exploring** We've barely scratched the surface of what digiKam can do – for example, you can use the 'Search' tab to quickly find photos by tag, label, place, date or other term, and the 'Export' menu to share images online, or experiment with image-editing and gallery-creation tools. We'll explore these in a future issue.

A dog is praised for helping rescue workers find people trapped after a bombing raid on London in 1940

GETTY IMAGES




# Animal Magic

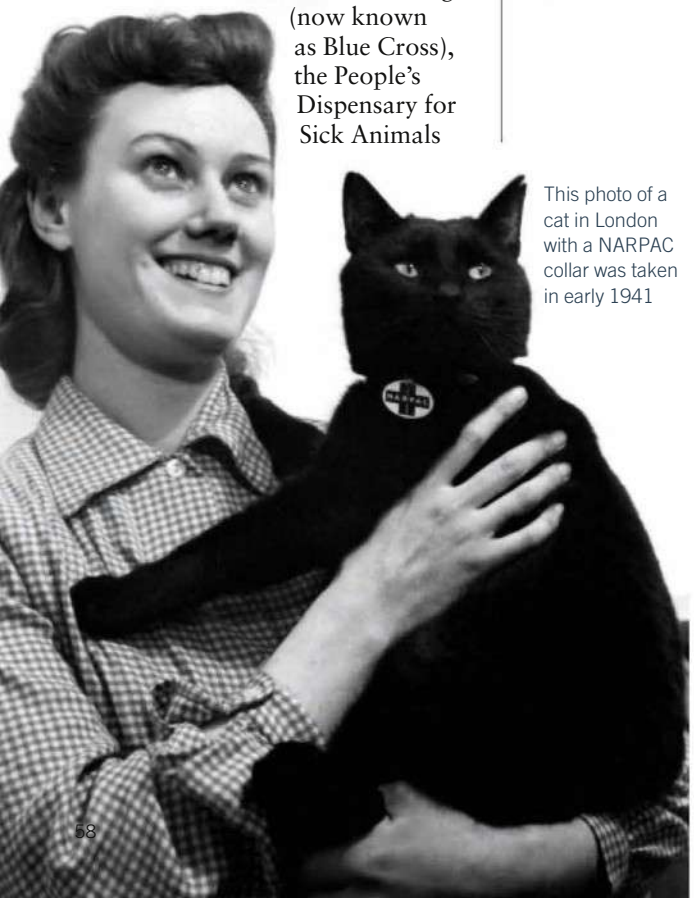
**Neil Storey** celebrates the incredible contribution that animals made in the Second World War

The worst loss of life among animals during the Second World War occurred before a single bomb had dropped on Great Britain. Official notices of advice to the public on how to prepare for air raids were published in national and local newspapers as the storm clouds gathered in 1939. In late August Home Office instructions regarding "What to Do With Your Pets" if war should come suggested, "If you and your family have to leave your home at very short notice and cannot take your animals with you – which will not be allowed if you are being evacuated under the official scheme – under no circumstances leave them in the house or turn them into the streets. If you cannot place them in the care of neighbours, it really is kindest to have them destroyed."

This caused many owners to make the heart-rending decision to have their cats, dogs and other pets put to sleep, resulting in the cull of 750,000 animals between August and September 1939.

When the bombing started, pets were officially barred from public air-raid shelters. However, animal-welfare organisations such as the Our Dumb Friends' League (now known as Blue Cross), the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and the National Canine Defence League (NCDL; now the Dogs Trust) had come together under the aegis of the Home Office to form the National Air Raid Precautions Animals Committee (NARPAC). And NARPAC created special air-raid shelters to accommodate both owners and their dogs.

Soldiers use a pigeon to send a message in 1940



This photo of a cat in London with a NARPAC collar was taken in early 1941

A registration scheme was also set up whereby volunteer 'animal guards' would visit owners in their designated area, record the details of each pet in a register, and issue a numbered disc to be affixed securely to the collar of every cat and dog. So in the event of the animal being recovered or straying as a result of an air raid, it could be easily identified and reunited with its owner.

## Defending Against Gas

NARPAC also established First Aid posts and mobile units to help injured animals. There were even decontamination units in the event of their fur being contaminated by poison gas. Great efforts were also made to design and provide gas masks for larger animals especially working horses and dogs, and to supply gas-proof boxes to protect cats and smaller dogs.

In the military animals also 'did their bit'. In the First World War horses had been used extensively by cavalry, for towing the guns of the artillery and for transport in the field. In the Second World War the War Office was determined that the British Army would go to war fully mechanised, and that is how the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) landed in France in September 1939.

However, difficult terrain such as mountain roads, and jungles and deserts in more distant parts of the world like India and the Middle East, was often unsuitable for motorised vehicles. So mounted troops and mules for transport were deployed instead. The first of approximately 3,000 mules that served with the BEF in the charge of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps and Cyprus Regiment troops arrived in France three months later.

Mounted troops would later be deployed to the Syrian campaign, after which the Cheshire Yeomanry had to give up its horses and the Yorkshire Dragoons, the last Yeomanry

GETTY IMAGES

## Rip The Dog This terrier helped rescue people from bombed buildings

A rough-haired mongrel terrier was found wandering lost and coated in brick dust after an air raid on Poplar, East London, in 1940. There was no sign of his owner, nor was there any clue to where he came from. He was taken on as the mascot of the Southill Street Air Raid Precautions Post, and given the name 'Rip'. Rather than sitting alone and frightened at the post, he accompanied the wardens as they attended scenes where houses had been bombed.

Rip had no training in search and rescue, but he would bark at the places where people had been trapped under the rubble of buildings, and over a 12-month period he helped to locate more than 100 casualties.

Rip's gallantry was recognised with the award of the PDSA's Dickin Medal in 1945, and he wore it on his collar until he died in 1946. He was the first of several Dickin Medal winners to be buried in the PDSA Cemetery in Ilford, Essex. You can learn more about the medal on the charity's site – see **tinyurl.com/pdsa-dickin**.

unit in the British Army to serve on horseback, bade farewell to their mounts in 1942. But mules continued to be used for transport in the desert, in the Italian campaign and through the jungles of the Far East until the end of the war. They were joined by other local beasts of burden, such as camels and even elephants.

### Canine Crusader

In the Second World War the British Army did not see any need for dogs until November 1939, when the French Army presented Mark, an Alsatian trained to carry ammunition to troops under fire, to the BEF. The War Office also realised they had missed a trick by not using sentry dogs, with their keen eyes and sense of smell and hearing. They were a remarkable asset to troops, especially for detecting the approach of the enemy at night, and they were soon deployed to units in the field. There was a shortage of suitable dogs for military service, so an appeal was made to the British public in newspapers and magazines for pet dogs of large breeds, especially Alsatians and collies. Some 7,000 people offered their dogs to the Army, and collection was undertaken by the RSPCA and NCDL. About 3,300 were found suitable and passed their training as guard dogs that were supplied to units all over the world. Eventually the Greyhound Racing Association kennels at Northaw, Hertfordshire, were commandeered and the Army War Dog Training School opened there in May 1942.

As the war progressed, special 'paradogs' were trained to undertake guard duties and assist patrols with the Parachute Regiment. They even had their own harness and parachute so that they could drop with their comrades. Dogs would also be trained to sniff out mines, and worked with both military and civilian organisations to locate air-raid victims under collapsed buildings.

Cats also played their part. Very difficult to train, they were used for what they instinctively did best: they caught vermin. Every ship would have had its cat and maybe even a dog for that purpose, as did many military barracks and stores.

The often forgotten animal heroes of the war are homing pigeons. German occupation forces recognised the danger posed by homing pigeons carrying clandestine messages, and orders were issued for wholesale destruction of lofts. There were culls of homing pigeons, and message-carrying rings were required to be handed in. Anyone failing to comply could face prison, or execution by firing squad. Such was the fear over the use of carrier pigeons that falconers in the German Army flew hawks around the coast of France to catch them. ▶

**German occupation forces recognised the danger posed by homing pigeons**

RAF flight lieutenant Eric Stanley Lock with his dog, 1941

GETTY IMAGES

A British Army sentry in Greece guards kitbags with a bulldog, 1942

In Britain in 1939 there was a real fear that German spies might use carrier pigeons to send messages across the Channel. Consequently, all homing pigeons in Britain came under government control. Owners had to obtain a permit in order to keep pigeons, and they had to register their birds with the police.

Just like dogs, pigeons were initially thought to no longer have a place on the battlefield. However, Major William Osman, whose father, Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Osman, had been a leading light in the training and organisation of homing pigeons for military service during the First World War, argued the case. The Committee of Imperial Defence saw his point, and as a result the National Pigeon Service (NPS) was created in 1938.

This civilian organisation was formed entirely of volunteer owners of homing-pigeon lofts who signed up to the scheme. It was a deal few could resist; in wartime pigeon food was rationed and it would be difficult to sustain a large loft, but in exchange for supplying 20 birds a month for military service, members of the NPS would be permitted to keep their lofts and buy feed.

**NEIL STOREY** is a social historian and author. His latest book *The British Soldier: Training for War 1939–1945* will be published by Pen & Sword on 30 November (RRP £25)

## Pigeon Feat

More than 200,000 pigeons were supplied by the NPS, and were deployed in theatres of war all over the world. If radios and field telephones failed, birds could carry messages in a fraction of the time it could take a dispatch rider to navigate twisting roads and obstacles between the front lines and headquarters.

Some messages turned the fate of a battle, or supplied information that saved thousands of lives. The Royal Navy had pigeons too in case ship-to-shore communications broke down and light or flag signals were not possible, while bombers carried pigeons in special transport boxes in the event of a crash.

In 1943 the PDSA's founder Maria Dickin created an award to recognise acts of gallantry by animals working with the armed forces and civil-defence units. Still being awarded to this day, the Dickin Medal is billed as "the Animals' Victoria Cross".

# Resources

**Take your research further**

**BOOKS**

*Animals in the Second World War*
**Neil R Storey**
*Bloomsbury, 2021*
Neil discusses animals' lives on the Home Front and their duties serving with military forces.

*Animals in War*
**Jilly Cooper**
*Corgi, 1984*
The bestselling novelist has written this moving account of the experiences of animals in warfare.

*The Animals' War*
**Juliet Gardiner**
*Portrait, 2006*
This title explores the many roles played by animals from the First World War to the present day.

**MUSEUMS**

AIRBORNE ASSAULT MUSEUM
a **Building 213, Imperial War Museum Duxford, Cambridgeshire CB22 4QR**
t 01223 839909
e *curator@paradata.org.uk*
w **paradata.org.uk**
Learn more about paradogs and their role in airborne forces.

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM
a **Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ**
t 020 7416 5000
w **iwm.org.uk**
There are exhibits and occasional special exhibitions about animals in war. See also **iwm.org.uk/history/9-famous-animals-from-the-first-and-second-world-wars**.

**WEBSITES**

BLUE CROSS
w **bluecross.org.uk/story/remembering-animals-second-world-war**
This charity helped animals during both world wars.

NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM
w **nam.ac.uk/subjects/animals**
NAM's site discusses animals in military service over the years, and the Royal Army Veterinary Corps.

GETTY IMAGES

# MERCHANDISE

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- West Midlands kin

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- The Irish Famine
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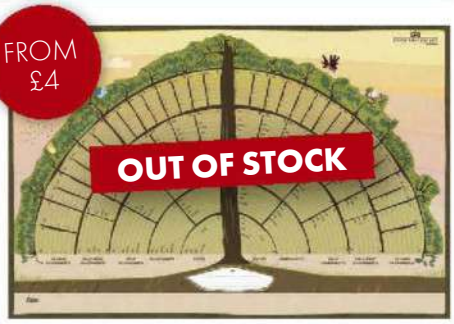


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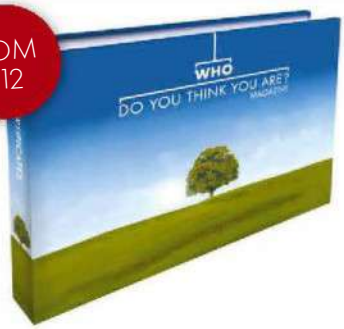


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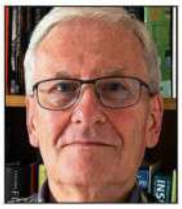
# 'Wills And DNA Testing Smashed My Welsh Brick Wall'

It took years of forensic detective work for Philip Leather to overcome a series of misfortunes and mistranscriptions in order to identify his 3x great grandfather. Interview by **Gail Dixon**

All family historians hit brick walls, and this is the story of the techniques (and luck) that enabled me to overcome a tough challenge. My 3x great grandfather Thomas Hoskin lived on the beautiful Gower Peninsula in South-West Wales during the early 19th century. His existence was almost lost thanks to transcription errors.



**PHILIP LEATHER** is a retired professor who lives in Shrewsbury, Shropshire. He has been researching his tree since 2016

## My Brick Wall

My great great grandmother Margaret Hoskin was baptised "illegitimate" in 1832 at Reynoldston, Gower. Thomas Hoskin was named as her father and her mother was Martha Ace, born in 1809.

In 2017, I began searching for children baptised Thomas Hoskin in or around Reynoldston going back to the 1790s. Lots of Hoskin children were baptised, but none of them was named Thomas.

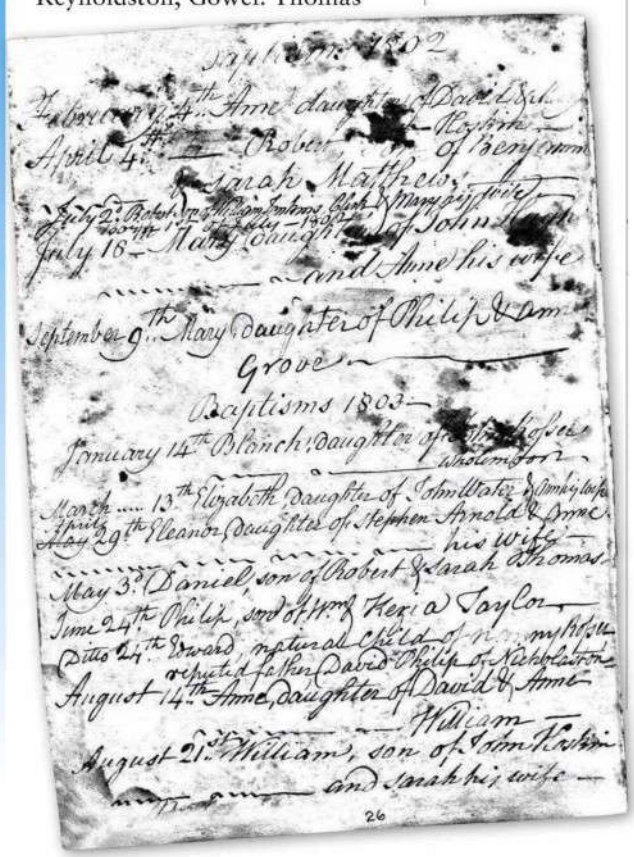
The 1841 census proved more promising, with three Thomas Hoskins living within five miles of Reynoldston. One, a labourer from Swansea with a large family, was easy to rule out.

The second candidate was a farmer from Bove Hill, a hamlet in the north of Gower overlooking a salt-marsh estuary.

This Thomas was born between 1802 and 1806, and married Mary Williams in 1824. They had two children before she died in 1830. The dalliance of 'my' Thomas with Martha Ace followed a year later.

Martha was to be disappointed if she had hoped to marry this Thomas, because four months after Margaret's baptism he married Elizabeth Holland. Her well-to-do father was the leaseholder of Bove Hill.

The third Thomas Hoskin lived near Llanmadoc, in north Gower, and was born in 1770 which made him 39 years older than Martha Ace. He was a farmer and butcher who had seven children with his wife Jane Richards. He was an unlikely candidate, but I couldn't rule him out.



The 1803 baptism of William Hoskin – Philip wondered if it should say "Thomas" instead

After 1841, there were no further census records for Thomas of Bove Hill, and in 1851 his wife Elizabeth married another farmer. Clearly he had died, but I couldn't find a death record for him.

## My Eureka Moment

My Thomas could have been either man, so I decided to assemble background profiles for all of the Hoskin families living around Reynoldston, working back from 1850.

Luckily, there was only one family named Hoskin baptising children contemporary with Thomas of Bove Hill.

John Hoskin, a farmer of Knelston Hall near Reynoldston, and his wife Sarah Bevan baptised six children between 1795 and 1812 at the nearby church of St David's, Llanddewi.

Frustratingly, none of the children was called Thomas.

Curiously, they baptised two sons called William in 1797 and 1803, although both survived until at least 1816. Perhaps the William who was born in 1803 was really Thomas, and the curate had made a mistake.

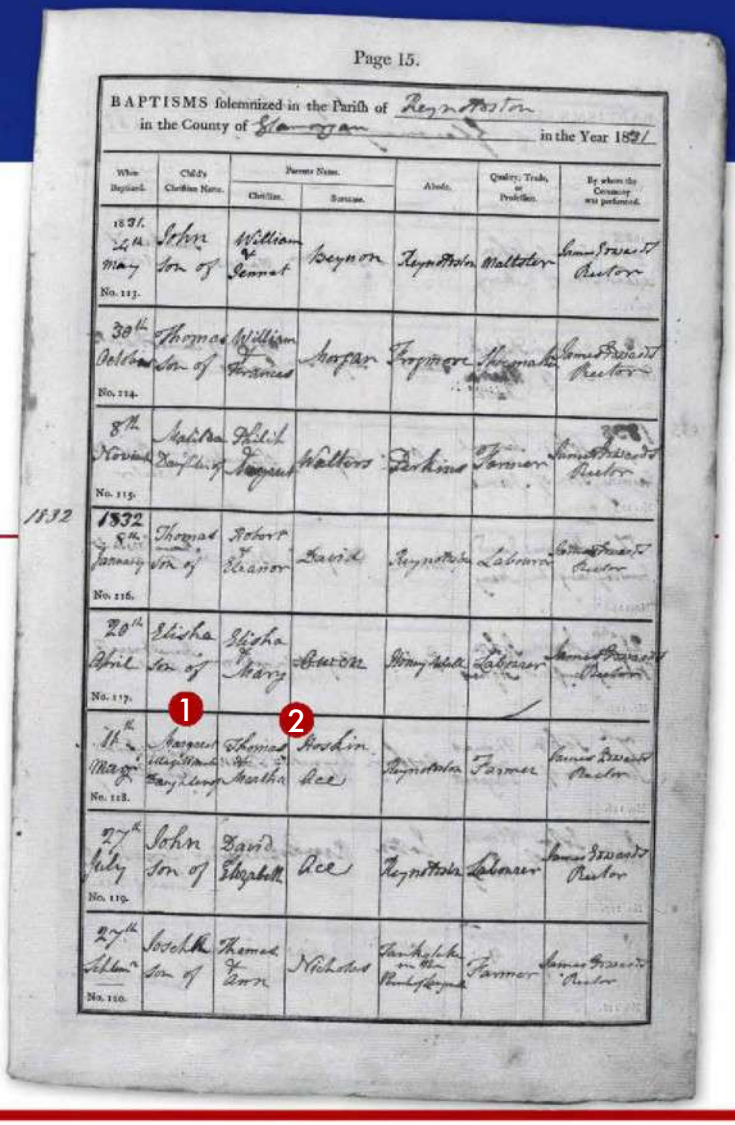
To my delight, both John Hoskin and his father William left wills. In his testament of 1817, John named his wife and surviving children, including son Thomas. Eureka! The same Thomas was also mentioned in his grandfather William's will.

## My Breakthrough

I constructed a detailed table of John and Sarah's family, and

## Baptism Record, 1832

Philip hit a brick wall when trying to research his great great grandmother Margaret's father



Page 15.

BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of Reynoston in the County of Glamorgan in the Year 1831

| When Baptized. | Child's Christian Name. | Parents Name. Christian. | Surname. | Abode. | Quality, Trade, or Profession. | By whom the Ceremony was performed. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1831. 24th May No. 113. | John Son of | William & Jennet | Beynon | Reynoston | Malster | James Bravant Rector |
| 30th October No. 114. | Thomas Son of | William & Frances | Morgan | Fagmore | Shoemaker | James Bravant Rector |
| 8th November No. 115. | Melitta Daughter of | Philip & Margaret | Walters | Perkins | Farmer | James Bravant Rector |
| 1832 8th January No. 116. | Thomas Son of | Robert & Eleanor | David | Reynoston | Labourer | James Bravant Rector |
| 20th April No. 117. | Elisha Son of | Elisha & Mary | Aaron | Penny Hill | Labourer | James Bravant Rector |
| 11th May No. 118. | Margaret illegitimate Daughter | Thomas & Martha | Hoskin | Reynoston | Farmer | James Bravant Rector |
| 27th July No. 119. | John Son of | David & Elizabeth | Ace | Reynoston | Labourer | James Bravant Rector |
| 27th October No. 120. | Joseph Son of | Thomas & Ann | Nicholas | Penkhelake in the Parish of Reynoston | Farmer | James Bravant Rector |

1832

1 2

# Baptism Record, 1832

Philip hit a brick wall when trying to research his great great grandmother Margaret's father

**1 Illegitimate**
The baptism record states clearly that Margaret was born illegitimately, which was relatively common at the time.

**2 Thomas Hoskin**
Unlike many records of illegitimate births, Margaret's father is named, although it took a lot of time and effort for Philip to identify the correct Thomas Hoskin.

discovered that tragically their sons William and John were buried on the same day in 1816. Newspaper reports revealed that they had both died from accidental arsenic poisoning.

I felt sure that their deaths would have been marked by a memorial, so I ordered a pamphlet of memorial transcriptions for St David's Church. There was a gravestone recording their burial and that of their brother Thomas, but he died aged only 10 in 1816. This was a huge setback.

I needed to see the memorial for myself, so I visited St David's Church in 2022. I found the family plot and the headstone recording the deaths of William and John in 1816. It was also inscribed, "Sacred to the memory of Thomas, son of John and Sarah Hoskin late of Bove Hill… who departed this life October 184? aged 40 years."

Even though it was incomplete, this revelation contradicted the booklet transcription which suggested that Thomas had died aged 10. I was back in business.

The end was in sight, but there were still setbacks. Looking through burial records for all Gower churches for 1843 I found an entry at nearby Llangennith for Thomas Hoskin of Bove Hill, but it had been crossed out. I can't think of any explanation for this.

There were no 1843 records for St David's online, but my nearest FamilySearch Family History Center (**familysearch.org/en/locations/centers**) had Bishops' Transcripts, and there he was. Eventually I found that Thomas had drowned at Llanmadoc Sands, near Bove Hill.

I was confident that I'd identified the correct Thomas. Final proof came when I had a DNA match on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) with two descendants of Thomas' sister Margaret.

Thomas was the victim of a string of transcription errors that could only be corrected by looking at original records. My search proves that hard work and a little luck can bring results.

The bottom line of Thomas's memorial in Llanddewi was mistranscribed as '10 Years'

• You can find out more about Philip's research at **leatherfamilystory.wixsite.com/my-family-story**

## Reader Tips

**What advice does Philip have for other family historians?**

- Build up a detailed picture of the lives of possible ancestors. You may find a connection.
- Taking a DNA test can identify mystery forebears.
- Try to view images of records, to avoid transcription errors.

**HAVE YOU BROKEN THROUGH A BRICK WALL?**

**Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!**

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

Fishing boats in Kirkcudbright Harbour on the River Dee

GETTY IMAGES

AROUND BRITAIN

# Dumfries & Galloway

**Jonathan Scott** finds a new heritage hub for family historians in south-west Scotland

This part of Scotland has historically been famous for agriculture and its associated trades – in particular skinners, dyers, shoemakers and glovemakers. But over the years a number of major manufacturing and industrial concerns made a home here.

Indeed during the First World War HM Factory Gretna became the largest munitions factory in the world, occupying a nine-mile cross-border site stretching from Longtown in England to Dornock in Dumfriesshire. Up to 30,000 workers were employed here, of whom 12,000 were women. The young workforce mixed cordite, which became known as 'devil's porridge' thanks to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle coining the phrase in a newspaper article. This is also the name given to a museum in the village of Eastriggs that tells the story of the factory (**devilsporridge.org.uk**). Since 2021, staff have been running a project to collate and research the lives of as many workers as possible, producing a free database that is now available online (**devilsporridge.org.uk/hm-factory-gretna-workers-database**).

**HM Factory Gretna became the largest munitions factory in the world**

The county collections for this part of Scotland are held by the heritage service (**dumfriesandgalloway.gov.uk/library-services/heritage-service**) and housed in the Ewart Library in Dumfries. Inside you'll find records from individuals, estates, businesses and organisations, alongside name-rich sources such as local newspapers, valuation rolls, school logbooks and registers, burial records and church records, not to mention

# Free Online Records

A munitions workers database, memorial inscriptions, indexes and the 1851 census

### 1851 Census

w **tinyurl.com/dumgal-1851**

Search transcribed census returns for Dumfriesshire, Kirkcudbrightshire and Wigtownshire on Dumfries and Galloway Council's website.

### Historical Indexes

w **tinyurl.com/dumgal-ind**

Dumfries and Galloway Council's site also has indexes to historical records, including jail books, police records, industrial-school registers, stent rolls and shipping registers.

### Local Newspapers

w **langholmarchive.org.uk**

Here you can search an index to local

title the *Eskdale and Liddesdale Advertiser* (1848–1909) created by the Langholm Archive Group.

### Munitions Workers

w **tinyurl.com/dpm-data**

A team at The Devil's Porridge Museum has built a database containing details of the staff at HM Factory Gretna.

### Memorial Inscriptions

w **kirkyards.co.uk**

This site has transcribed gravestone inscriptions from Kirkcudbrightshire churchyards. There's also a comprehensive gazetteer, genealogy articles and links at **kirkcudbright.co** (sic).

irregular marriage records from the world-famous Gretna Green.

Hidden among these is the little-known 'Population of Wamphray 1697', a unique, one-off proto-census. The document itself is a modest photocopy of information written in an old book kept by the minister of the parish. It lists the names of 86 locals, children and adults, as well as the places they lived. However, not everyone is recorded, and it's assumed that this is because the minister only included his Church of Scotland congregation – omitting anyone who was Church of England.

## Recording The Unseen

Dumfries and Galloway heritage officer Anne Rinaldi says, "It records people who are not typically 'seen' or included in records of the time, such as agricultural workers and servants. It also records their farms, some of which still exist, while others were subsumed to make large, more economically viable farms during the late 18th century."

Visitors to the Ewart Library will notice that things have changed since we last covered the area in July 2021. Following a six-month closure earlier this year, the listed building, which first opened its doors in 1904, reopened as a combined flagship library and heritage hub.

Anne says that the recent transformation was something of a balancing act – preserving the integrity of its heritage while modernising for today's researchers. The library now boasts an archive searchroom, complete with new furniture and display boards, upgraded rolling stacks in the strongroom, free WiFi, new public-access PCs, and a refurbished digital-access room. There's also a touchscreen microfiche reader that researchers can use to trawl local newspapers all the way back to 1777.

"The building itself has been lovingly restored – original windows refurbished, the cupola and sandstone statues cleaned and preserved, and the stunning mosaic floor and wall tiles in the foyer uncovered and cleaned."

One of the largest collections held at Ewart, owned by NHS Dumfries and Galloway, relates ▶

A female worker at the munitions factory at Gretna Green during the First World War

GETTY IMAGES

to Crichton Royal Hospital. This asylum originally opened in June 1839 with room for about 120 beds – half were allocated to private paying patients, and the rest were for paupers. It would eventually become an internationally recognised centre of excellence in mental health research and care, particularly through the pioneering work of Dr William AF Browne (1805–1885), its superintendent for almost 20 years, who extolled "moral treatment" for patients that included recreation and occupation. He oversaw theatre performances and the creation of a patient library and a patient newspaper, alongside many more therapeutic pastimes.

## Digitised Asylum Records

The collection, which takes up about 360 feet of shelf space, includes patient records (1838–c1999), staff records (1843–2005), and material relating to "recreation and occupation" and the institution's founding, alongside prints, engravings, drawings and photographs. The Wellcome Trust has digitised the majority of records relating to the hospital, and you can explore these via **wellcomecollection.org/works/utmcnmq8**.

You can learn about Ian Holmes at the Ewart Library

Since our last visit lots of new material has also arrived at Ewart, including two collections relating to famous local musicians.

The self-taught accordion maestro Ian Holmes (born 1935), alongside a long and successful performing career, ran a beloved music shop in Dumfries for 27 years. There's also the Jack Walker Band Collection, preserving the legacy of a musician who is credited with bringing jazz to the dance halls and ballrooms throughout the region, and helping to boost morale during the Second World War. His legacy lives on through a collection of original music scores, photographs and newspaper clippings. And you can listen to examples of both men's work via View Dumfries and Galloway, the heritage service's online digital collection: **viewdumfriesandgalloway.co.uk**.

Archive staff have also been digitising and cataloguing material relating to local architect Walter Newall (1780–1863), as well as legendary journalist Frank Ryan (1930–2013).

His archive contains roughly 52,000 photographs, plus some 1,000 glass negatives, 25,000 celluloid negatives, scrapbooks, diaries and letters.

## Witness To An Atrocity

Anne says, "As a Dumfries-based staff reporter Frank covered everything from local stories to international events. He was the first journalist on the scene in Lockerbie following the 1988 disaster, when Pan Am Flight 103 was destroyed by a terrorist bomb in mid-air over the town, and later reported from former United States Air Force base Camp Zeist in the Netherlands during the trial of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, a Libyan intelligence officer who was convicted of the crime. At the request of the Pan Am 103 families, Frank travelled to the USA, offering his perspective and support during the relatives' search for justice."

For several years the Friends of the Archives of Dumfries and Galloway have been indexing and transcribing important name-rich sources for the region. The result is a collection of free finding aids covering everything from the 1851 census to bail-bond registers, available on Dumfries and Galloway Council's site at **https://info.dumgal.gov.uk/HistoricalIndexes**.

Other digital collections and highlights can be explored via the regularly updated View Dumfries and Galloway, or there's the Dumfries and Galloway Council Archives Catalogue at **archives.dumgal.gov.uk/calmview/**.

**TOP TIP!**

An index of shipping registers for Dumfries, Kirkcudbright, Stranraer and Wigtown, some of which go back to 1824, is on Dumfries and Galloway Council's site at **tinyurl.com/info-dumgal-ship**.

**LOCAL INDUSTRY**

## North British Rubber Company

**You're in luck if your ancestor worked here**

There's a substantial archive for the firm behind the brand

The North British Rubber Company, famous for producing Hunter Wellington boots, was founded in Edinburgh in 1856 by Henry Lee Norris. The firm then expanded its operations to Dumfries, acquiring a factory in the suburb of Heathhall that had been built for car manufacturer Arrol-Johnston. The North British Rubber Company's archives, which include employee registers, are currently being cleaned, housed and catalogued by volunteers at the Ewart Library.

GETTY IMAGES | DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY HERITAGE SERVICE

# DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

## ARCHIVES & LIBRARIES

### Dumfries And Galloway Heritage Service

a **Ewart Library, Catherine Street, Dumfries DG1 1JB**
t 030 3333 3004
e *heritage@dumgal.gov.uk*
w **dumfriesandgalloway.gov.uk/library-services/heritage-service**

Genealogical sources including local newspapers back to 1777, court records, school logbooks, plus records of local government and health boards are available at the refurbished, rebranded library.

### Ayrshire Archives

a **South Harbour Street, Ayr KA7 1JA**
t 01292 616260
e *archives@south-ayrshire.gov.uk*
w **ayrshirearchives.org.uk**

The archive service for South, East and North Ayrshire Councils runs the headquarters in Ayr plus the Burns Monument Centre (Kay Park, Kilmarnock, KA3 7RU).

### Cumbria Archives

a **Carlisle Archive Centre, Lady Gillford's House, Petteril Bank Road, Carlisle, Cumbria CA1 3AJ**
t 01228 227284
e *carlisle.archives@cumberland.gov.uk*
w **cumbriaarchives.org.uk/archive-centres**

Being so close to the border you may well find relevant material at Cumbria Archives, which as well as its archive centre in Carlisle runs three more in Barrow, Kendal and Whitehaven. There are also useful online indexes to cemetery records, newspaper articles, bastardy bonds and memorial inscriptions.

### Dumfries And Galloway Libraries

w **dumfriesandgalloway.gov.uk/library-services/find-library**

View details of libraries across the area, many of which maintain their own local history collections.

### Scottish Borders Archive

a **Heritage Hub, Kirkstile, Hawick TD9 0AE**
t 01450 360699
e *collections@liveborders1.org.uk*
w **liveborders.org.uk/borders-collection-online/heritage-hub-archives-local-studies/**

The wide-ranging collections here run from the local textile industry to legendary rugby commentator Bill McLaren (1923–2010), who was born in Hawick. The hub is also the location of the Internment Research Centre, where you can find out more about nearby Stobs Camp, which held civilian and military prisoners of war during the First World War, and visitors can pay £15 a day for unlimited access to government genealogical website Scotland's People (**scotlandspeople.gov.uk**).

### South Lanarkshire Council Archives And Records Centre

a **32 Hawbank Road, East Kilbride G74 5EX**
t 01355 239193
e *archives@southlanarkshire.gov.uk*
w **southlanarkshire.gov.uk/info/200165/local_and_family_history/588/archives_and_records/8**

The local collections here include records of agricultural auctioneers, solicitors, brass founders and funeral directors.

## GROUPS & SOCIETIES

### Borders Family History Society

w **bordersfhs.org.uk**

The society covers the counties of Berwickshire, Peeblesshire, Roxburghshire and Selkirkshire.

### Dumfries And Galloway Family History Society

a **9 Glasgow Street, Dumfries DG2 9AF**
t 01387 248093
e *researchcentre@dgfhs.org.uk*
w **dgfhs.org.uk**

The society covers Dumfriesshire, Kirkcudbrightshire and Wigtownshire. The website is full of useful information such as parish maps and GPS locations of the region's 240 graveyards, plus lists of Old Parish Registers (OPRs) and an index to the society's newsletter. You can order transcriptions of OPRs and memorial inscriptions by parish from the online shop, while the research centre in Glasgow Street includes a library of microfilm and microfiche of OPRs, census data and newspaper indexes.

## MUSEUMS

### Dumfries Museum And Camera Obscura

a **The Observatory, Rotchell Road, Dumfries DG2 7SW**
t 01387 253374
e *dumfriesmuseum@dumgal.gov.uk*
w **dgculture.co.uk/venue/dumfries-museum/**

The museum's windmill tower houses the world's oldest working camera obscura.

### Sanquhar Tolbooth Museum

a **High Street, Sanquhar DG4 6BN**
t 01659 50186
e *dumfriesmuseum@dumgal.gov.uk*
w **dgculture.co.uk/venue/sanquhar-tolbooth-museum/**

The museum, which is located in an 18th-century tolbooth, tells the story of the local mining and knitting trades. It's open to visitors between 1 April and 30 September every year.

### The Devil's Porridge Museum

a **Stanfield, Annan Road, Eastriggs DG12 6TF**
t 01461 700021
e *info@devilsporridge.org.uk*
w **devilsporridge.org.uk**

Learn about the munitions factory at Gretna that played a crucial role during the First World War.

### The Stewartry Museum

a **St Mary Street, Kirkcudbright DG6 4AQ**
t 01557 331643
e *anne.ramsbottom@dumgal.gov.uk*
w **dgculture.co.uk/venue/the-stewartry-museum-kirkcudbright/**

View a wealth of objects relating to the area known as the Stewartry, or Kirkcudbrightshire. There's also a local history library with a photographic archive.

## WEBSITES

### FamilySearch

w **tinyurl.com/fs-scot**

This page of the FamilySearch wiki summarises genealogical resources for all of Scotland, on this website and elsewhere.

### Scotland's People

w **scotlandspeople.gov.uk**

The website includes Scotland-wide census material; wills; statutory births, marriages and deaths; OPRs; and valuation rolls.

# Ipswich Gaol book, 1858–1860

**Hannah Glasse** from Suffolk Archives shares a book of prisoners, as well as the fascinating story of a young thief Interview By Rosemary Collins

The Victorian age saw the birth of the criminal-justice system as we know it today in Britain, with the establishment of modern policing and prisons. More criminal records were created than ever before, and many of us can still find an ancestor in those records today. Hannah Glasse, collections manager at Suffolk Archives, tells us how the archive holds a series of gaol books recording prison inmates in the 19th century – and why they're a gold mine for family historians.

## What Is A Gaol Book?

Local gaols used gaol books to record the arrival, crimes and sentences of prisoners. Typically, local gaols housed prisoners who had been convicted of lesser crimes, such as stealing, trespassing and begging, while convicts who had committed more serious crimes were sent to larger prisons instead.

The book itself, catalogue reference A609/19, is a large, bound volume containing numerous individual entries for prisoners, both men and women, admitted to Ipswich Gaol from the surrounding area, including some very rural communities.

## What Dates Does The Gaol Book Cover?

This one begins in December 1858, and runs to August 1860. However, the 32 gaol books that together make up the collection 'Ipswich Gaol Receiving Books' (A609) between them cover 1840–1867. The dates and extent of the collection reflect the 19th-century upturn in the trend of prison sentences being used as punishment for criminal activity. The survival of records from prisons, such as gaol books, is patchy and the 32-strong A609 collection is an anomaly in this respect.

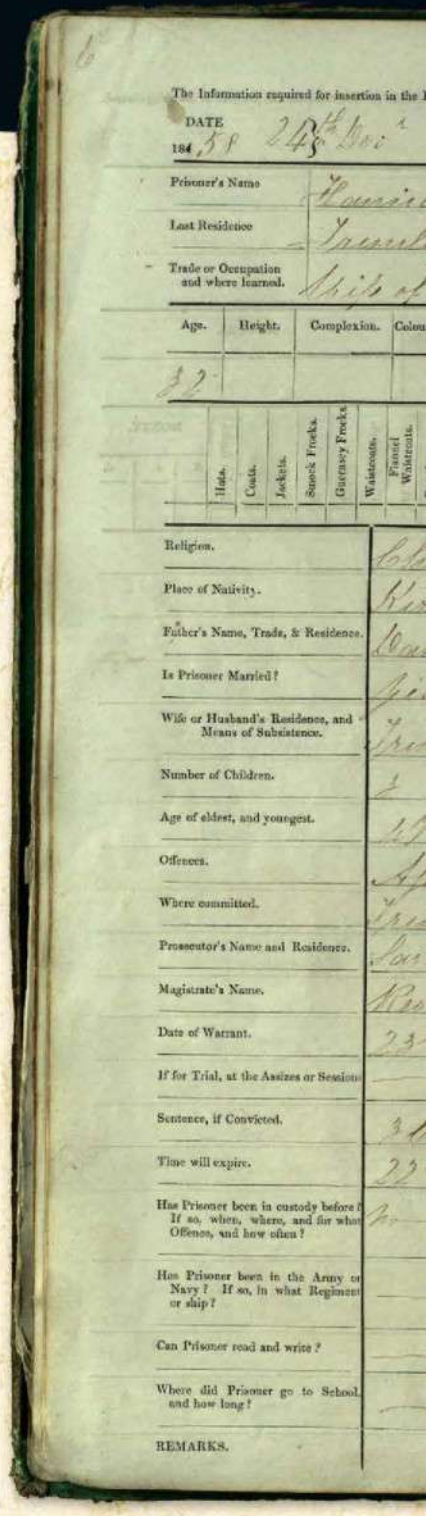
## What Information Does The Book Hold?

Each entry within the gaol book follows a standard template form to record information relating to the prisoner being admitted. However, the extent of the information, as well as any further extra details about the prisoners, is where the book really comes into its own as a valuable resource for family historians.

Not only does the book record basic details regarding the prisoner's identity, such as name, age, trade or occupation, place of last residence, marital status, father's name and trade, but it also really puts the flesh on the bones of the individuals.

Rolling forward to the present day, photographic images are the primary source for identification of prisoners being admitted into custody, so what did they do before this was an option? The gaol books record detailed information about the appearance of individuals: height, complexion, eye colour, hair colour, visage (shape and proportion of face), clothes worn on apprehension, and money in their possession.

There is also space to record any distinguishing marks that the prisoner might have, such as scars, moles or freckles, and even in some cases tattoos (there is an example of this in gaol book A609/1). Rarely in any other records are we, as researchers, privy to such detailed information about personal appearance and situation than for those individuals who are documented in gaol books.



The Information required for insertion in the
DATE
184 58 24th Dec
Prisoner's Name
Last Residence
Trade or Occupation and where learned.
Age. Height. Complexion. Colour
32
Hats. Coats. Jackets. Smock Frocks. Guernsey Frocks. Waistcoats. Flannel Waistcoats.
Religion.
Place of Nativity.
Father's Name, Trade, & Residence.
Is Prisoner Married?
Wife or Husband's Residence, and Means of Subsistence.
Number of Children.
Age of eldest, and youngest.
Offences.
Where committed.
Prosecutor's Name and Residence.
Magistrate's Name.
Date of Warrant.
If for Trial, at the Assizes or Sessions
Sentence, if Convicted.
Time will expire.
Has Prisoner been in custody before? If so, when, where, and for what Offence, and how often?
Has Prisoner been in the Army or Navy? If so, in what Regiment or ship?
Can Prisoner read and write?
Where did Prisoner go to School, and how long?
REMARKS.

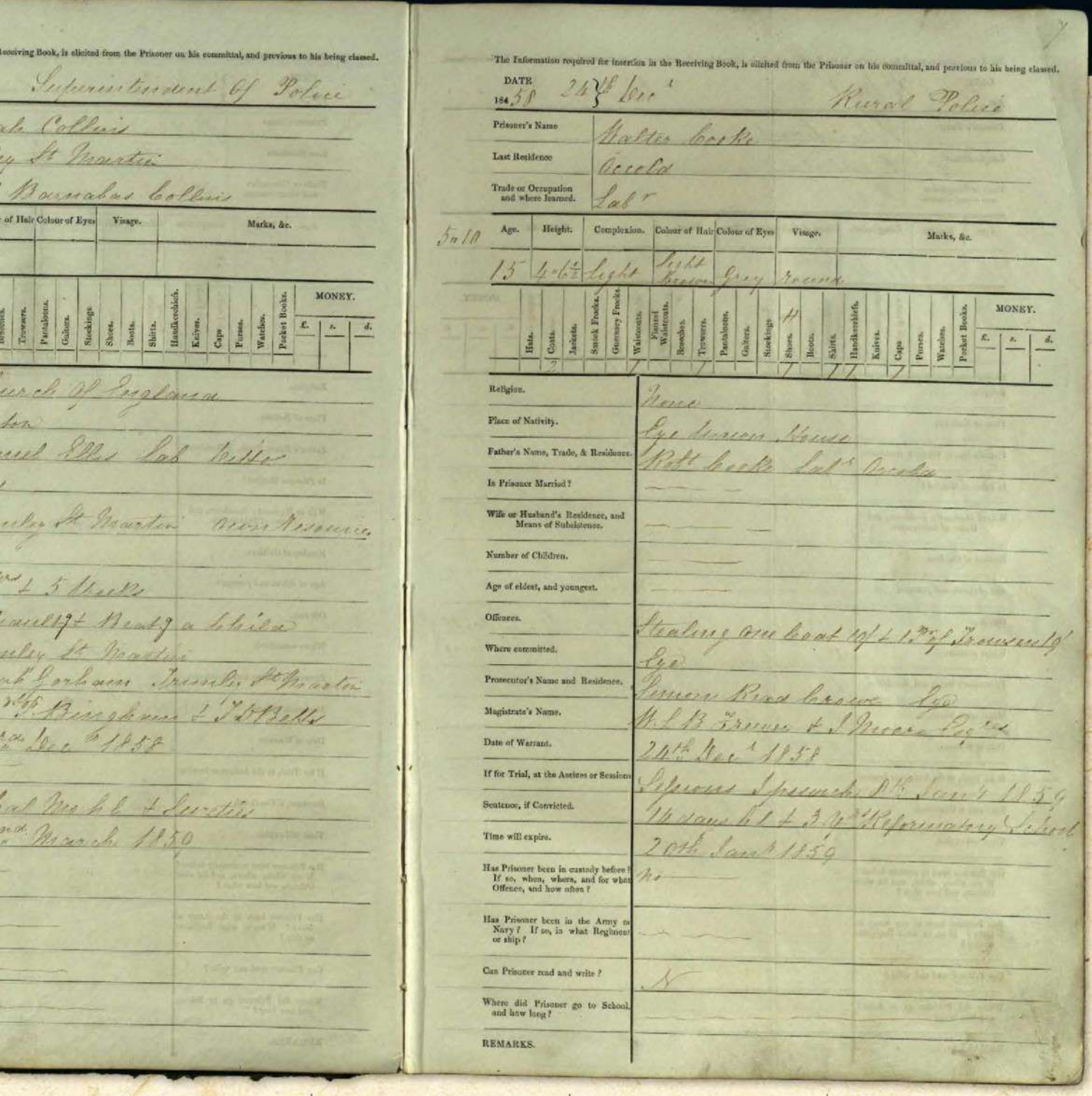
## Does The Book Reveal Any Interesting Stories?

One entry tells the sad story of a young lad named Walter Cook(e). Walter was apprehended and admitted to prison on Christmas Eve 1858, at the age of just 15, for stealing a coat and a pair of trousers. Of course, we cannot be sure why Walter stole the clothes, but we can gain insight into his life from the information contained in the gaol book. Walter had never been in prison before, and could not read or write; he was the son of a labourer in a very rural village called

## Visit Us

**Suffolk Archives**
a The Hold, 131 Fore Street, Ipswich IP4 1LR
t 01473 296666
e *archives@suffolk.gov.uk*
w **www.suffolkarchives.co.uk**

The collections at Suffolk Archives include letters, reports, maps, plans, photographs and local studies material. It is open Tuesday to Saturday, 10am–4.30pm.



The Information required for insertion in the Receiving Book, is elicited from the Prisoner on his committal, and previous to his being classed.

DATE 184 58 24th Dec Rural Police

Prisoner's Name: Walter Cooke

Last Residence: Occold

Trade or Occupation and where learned: Labr

| Age. | Height. | Complexion. | Colour of Hair | Colour of Eyes | Visage. | Marks, &c. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | 4 ft 6½ | Light | Light brown | Grey | round | |

| Hats. | Caps. | Jackets. | Smock Frocks. | Guernsey Frocks. | Waistcoats. | Flannel Waistcoats. | Breeches. | Trowsers. | Pantaloons. | Gaiters. | Stockings. | Shoes. | Boots. | Shirts. | Handkerchiefs. | Knives. | Caps. | Purses. | Watches. | Pocket Books. | MONEY. £. | s. | d. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2 | | | | 1 | | | 1 | | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Religion. | None |
| Place of Nativity. | Eye Union House |
| Father's Name, Trade, & Residence. | Robt Cooke Labr Occold |
| Is Prisoner Married? | — |
| Wife or Husband's Residence, and Means of Subsistence. | — |
| Number of Children. | — |
| Age of eldest, and youngest. | — |
| Offences. | Stealing one boat w/t 1 Mg of Ironwork of Eye |
| Where committed. | Denver Bird house Eye |
| Prosecutor's Name and Residence. | |
| Magistrate's Name. | M. L B Frere & J Moore Esqrs |
| Date of Warrant. | 24th Dec 1858 |
| If for Trial, at the Assizes or Sessions. | Seperous Sessions 18 Jan 1859 |
| Sentence, if Convicted. | 14 days C.H. & 3 yrs Reformatory School |
| Time will expire. | 20th Jan 1859 |
| Has Prisoner been in custody before? If so, when, where, and for what Offence, and how often? | No |
| Has Prisoner been in the Army or Navy? If so, in what Regiment or ship? | — |
| Can Prisoner read and write? | N |
| Where did Prisoner go to School, and how long? | |
| REMARKS. | |

Occold, and his last known place of residence was Eye Union House – a workhouse. Perhaps he was stealing for his own warmth and comfort in the cold winter months, or perhaps he was stealing to sell for money – we don't know. But what we can surmise is that Walter was likely to be living in poverty. At 15 his stature reached all of 4 foot 6½ inches, he carried no money on him, and his eyes were grey. The punishment for Walter's criminality was 14 days of hard labour, and three years of Reformatory School.

Beyond the gaol book, we can trace Walter's family situation elsewhere in records held at Suffolk Archives. We see him in the 1851 census living at home with his family. The records of Kerrison Reformatory School (reference GB13) reflect Walter's sentencing recorded in the gaol book. Eventually, we trace Walter into the Royal Navy, where the trail disappears. At Suffolk Archives, we like to think that Walter made a success of himself and settled down following his hard start in life, but we just don't know.

## What Other Records Does The Archive Hold?

We aim to safeguard the heritage of our rich county for present audiences and for generations to come. We collect material from organisations, charities, schools, parishes, institutions, communities and individuals, all with a rooted connection to Suffolk and its people. Our documents range in age from 1119 to the present day, and we emphasise the importance of contemporary collecting to document the changing physical, human, industrial and commercial landscape of the county. Our approximately 11,000 discrete collections boast a wide variety of records, from maps to minutes of meetings, diaries to manorial rolls, and photographs to artwork.

Our collections offer rich evidence and research opportunities for anyone tracing Suffolk ancestors, and the gaol books are just one of the many sources available. Readers can view a selection by visiting our free exhibition 'Behind Bars: Suffolk's Criminal Past', which runs until 17 January 2026.

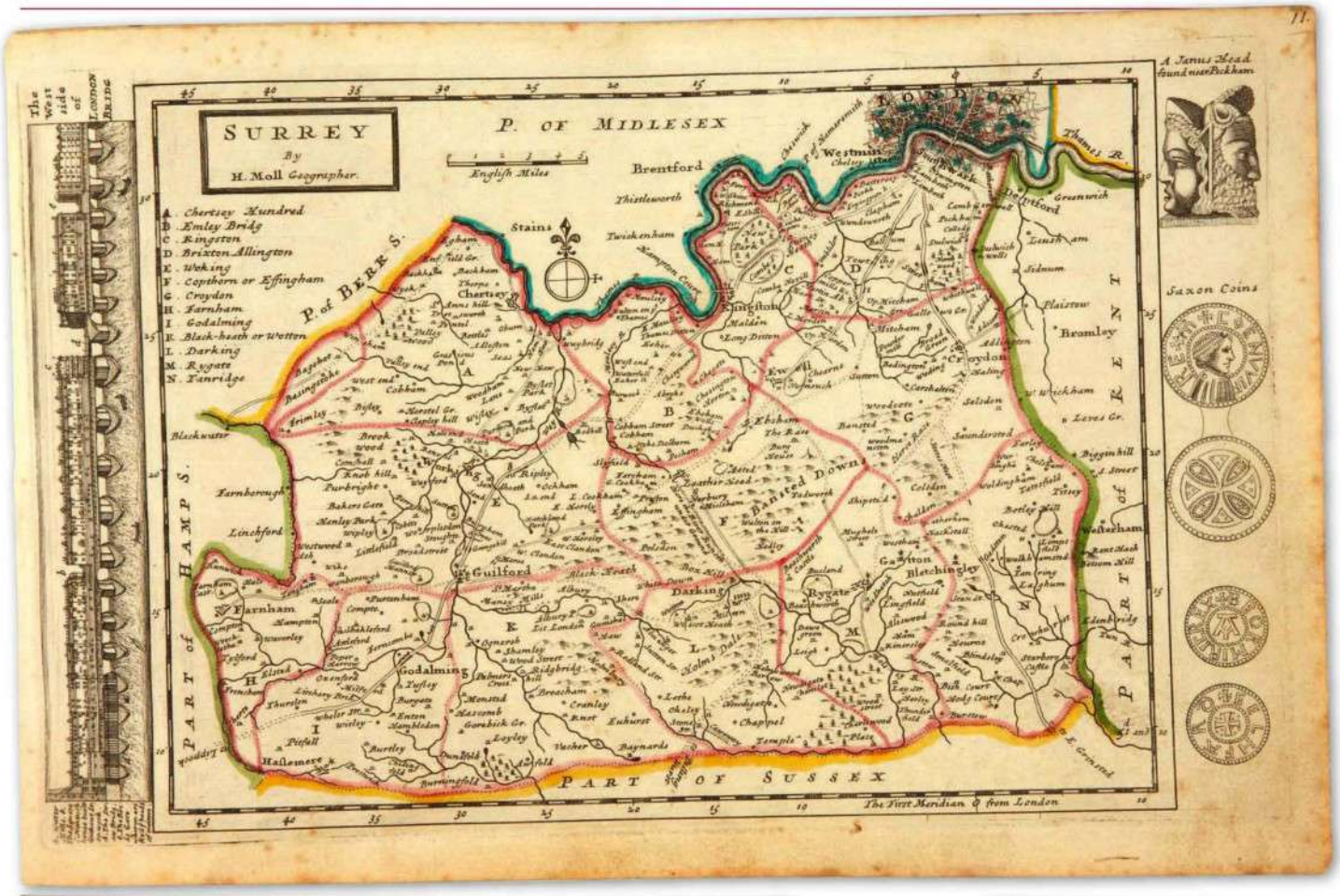
# REVIEWS

The latest books on history and genealogy, plus apps, podcasts and websites

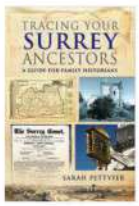
FAMILY HISTORY

## Tracing Your Surrey Ancestors
### A Guide For Family Historians

**Sarah Pettyfer**
*Pen & Sword,*
*224 pages, £15.99*



The book's images include *(counter-clockwise from top)* a 1724 map of Surrey, a view of the London and Croydon Railway (1838), and St Martha's Church, Chilworth, and its graveyard




All family historians, new and experienced, will be frustrated at some point when a trail goes cold. Sarah Pettyfer's book is to be welcomed as the latest in a series of Pen & Sword publications designed to help such researchers to identify potential sources they might have missed, and where they can be found. The focus is on Surrey, but the different types of source identified should also be of interest in other parts of the country. Note that this is not a guide explaining how to 'do' family history. The author is very clear in setting her primary objective as to provide a roadmap for introducing readers to sources and resources that might help those seeking to trace their ancestors.

The book sets out succinctly the historic, administrative and economic context within which Surrey forebears lived their lives, before going on in four detailed chapters to describe the sources and their location in local and national collections. The coverage is comprehensive, ranging across the centuries and from manorial, legal and parish material through to governmental, individual and newspaper collections. Any gaps, such as the failure to draw attention to the 1939 Register of England and Wales as an important census substitute, are rare and do not detract from the overall usefulness of this work.

*Tracing Your Surrey Ancestors* does not have to be read from cover to cover by every reader, but will undoubtedly be referred to frequently by family historians eager to identify potential sources and to interpret what they are looking at. As such it will prove to be an invaluable research tool.

**Dr Alan Wright is the author of *Their Day Has Passed: Gypsies in Victorian and Edwardian Surrey* (Grosvenor House Publishing, 2017)**

ARCHI UK | WELLCOME COLLECTION, REPRODUCED UNDER CC PDM 1.0 | SARAH PETTYFER

## DIGITAL PICKS

Rosemary Collins highlights three digital resources that caught our eye this month

PODCAST

### Was Justice Served?

**Podcast services**

Genealogical records website Findmypast has just released the second series of its podcast. In each episode David Wilson, a professor of criminology, and researcher Jen Baldwin examine a historic murder case and ask – was the guilty person really guilty? You can also view British Newspaper Archive clippings relating to each case at **findmypast.co.uk/was-justice-served**. Free.

RADIO

### The Three Babies Mystery

**tinyurl.com/bbc-snds-3-bab (UK only) or bbc.com**

In this documentary that aired on Radio 4, Sanchia Berg investigates the case of three babies who were found abandoned in East London between 2019 and 2024, gaining access to the Family Court and to the police investigation. DNA testing shows that they're all related – but what has happened to the mother? Free.

WATCH

### Offaly History Lectures

**tinyurl.com/yt-off-hist**

Available on YouTube, this series of lectures from Offaly History (the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society) explores the rich heritage of the county and Ireland more generally. The topics include *Michael Collins's Diaries: A New Source, New Perspectives?*, *Traditional Architecture in Offaly* and *Using the Records of the Valuation Office in Family and Local History*. Free.

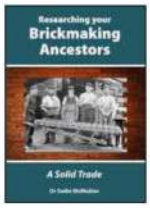
GETTY IMAGES

## Researching Your Brickmaking Ancestors A Solid Trade

SOCIAL HISTORY

**Dr Sadie McMullon**

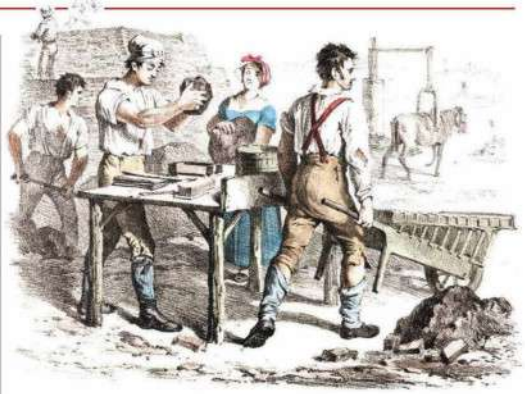
*Family History Books, 223 pages, £14.95*




As the author of this gem of a book points out, bricks are so ubiquitous, most of us don't give them a second thought – but they were, quite literally, the building block of the Industrial Revolution. With a nod to early history, Dr Sadie McMullon concentrates on the 19th and early 20th century, with plenty of detail on the kinds of jobs involved, how gangs worked, and how they were paid. She looks at innovations that were usually fought against, but eventually embraced, and the impact of changing legislation. Although the vast majority of workers were men, both women and children joined gangs, sometimes as a family group.

McMullon's writing style is engaging and even chatty in places as she shares her passion for the topic. Although the records mentioned are ones that most experienced family historians will already be aware of, this book explains why you may find an ancestor described as a brickmaker in one record and not in another, or why you may find him in Poor Law records in winter – brickmaking was seasonal work, only available from March to October.

All in all, this is an essential read for anyone who has a connection to brickmakers.



A small-scale brickmaking operation, 1821

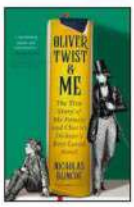
**Sarah Williams is the editor of *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine***

## Reader Review YOUR CHANCE TO ASSESS THE LATEST BOOKS

## Oliver Twist & Me The True Story Of My Family And Charles Dickens's Best-Loved Novel

FAMILY BIOGRAPHY

Nicholas Blincoe *Bridge Street, 336 pages, £25*

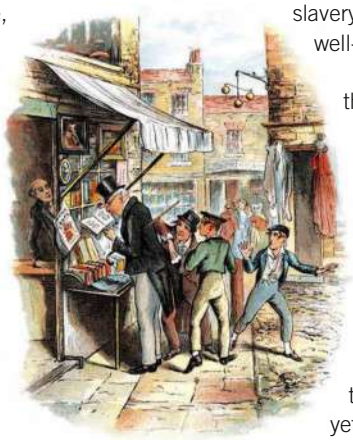



The writer of this book, Nicholas Blincoe, is the 3x great grandson of Robert Blincoe, the orphan whose memoir is believed to have influenced Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837–1839). This dual biography cleverly weaves together the lives of Dickens and the author's ancestor. Blincoe retraces the journeys of both figures from London and Kent to Manchester's mills. The book is a labour of love that makes us want to visit each area. Although a hard read in places (as is *Oliver Twist* for that matter), covering the realities of abandoned infants, baby farms and their high mortality rates, and child slavery and cruelty, it is an extremely well-researched social history.

Descriptions of places, then and now, enhance this fascinating read. We also learn about Dickens the person, the philanthropist and the writer.

Blincoe's introduction, recalling a family gathering in 1974, sets the scene for this accessible book in a humorous and engaging tone.

Whether you are reading the original novel or watching yet another TV or big-screen adaptation, Blincoe's book will enhance the experience.



The Artful Dodger picks a pocket, depicted by George Cruikshank

**Jill Ritchie, East Grinstead**

**Jill is researching her father's life after finding out about a half-sister from his first marriage**

**Join Us... Send us an email if you'd like to join our reviewing panel e *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk***

# TV & RADIO

**Rosemary Collins** previews upcoming programmes on history and family history

## Empire With David Olusoga

**BBC Two and BBC iPlayer**
**Late November TBC**

David Olusoga investigates the complicated legacy of the British Empire in his latest BBC series

More than a quarter of the world's countries are former British colonies. The British Empire was one of the greatest powers the world has ever known, and its rise and fall spanned over three centuries. Many of our ancestors will have had a connection to the empire, either as colonisers or inhabitants of the colonised countries. But what is the empire's legacy today?

In this three-part series, historian and TV presenter David Olusoga (*Black and British: A Forgotten History*, *A House Through Time*) explores the empire's origins, its story and its aftermath. In the first episode, he dates its beginning to the surprisingly idyllic setting of the River Dart in Devon. In 1592, the *Madre de Dios*, a Portuguese trading ship, was led up the river after being captured by English privateers. Its cargo of priceless spices, drugs and silks revealed the growing role in international trade played by Portugal and Spain – and made English merchants want to catch up.

England's efforts to build a trading empire spread around the world – frequently destructively. In the USA, settlers established a colony at Jamestown in Virginia and expanded across the country, fighting devastating wars with the indigenous tribes. In Barbados, the native rainforest was destroyed to plant sugar plantations – worked at first by indentured British labourers, but soon by enslaved Africans. In India, the British began by trading with the ruling Mughal Empire, itself a great colonial power, but then supplanted it. When the Great Bengal Famine of 1770 struck, killing millions, the British rulers continued to force the local people to pay taxes despite rampant starvation.

Olusoga dives deep into archival and archaeological records, bringing history to life. He also interviews people with familial connections to the empire.

The history of the British Empire is still divisive and contested today. But as one interviewee says, "This is the full picture. I'm not asking you to be ashamed of it, but I am asking you to be aware of it."

### Cyfrinachau'r Llyfrgell

**BBC iPlayer**
**Streaming now**

In this S4C series, whose title translates as *Best Kept Secrets*, celebrities visit the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth and view records that shed a light on their life, family history and interests. It begins with Mark Drakeford, former first minister of Wales, seeing material ranging from the correspondence of prime minister David Lloyd George to testimonies from the 17th-century Great Plague, and reflecting on parallels with the Covid-19 pandemic. Other episodes star actor Siân Phillips, former rugby player Scott Quinnell and writer Caryl Lewis. English subtitles are available.

### The Forsytes

**Channel 5 and the 5 app**
**Continues Mondays at 9pm**

The latest adaptation of novelist John Galsworthy's series *The Forsyte Saga* (1906–1921) depicts a world ruled by, to quote matriarch Ann Forsyte (Francesca Annis), "stock, and family, and repute". In Edwardian London, the 'new money' Forsyte family have built up a thriving stockbroking firm, and want to boost their social standing with an advantageous marriage for June (Justine Moore), the stepdaughter of Jolyon (Danny Griffin). But his life is upended when former lover Louisa Byrne (Eleanor Tomlinson), a lady's maid turned dressmaker, returns. Elsewhere, Jolyon's cousin and rival for the business Soames (Joshua Orpin) falls for dancer Irene Heron (Millie Gibson). All of the Forsytes are torn between the demands of tradition and personal happiness, and a second series has already been commissioned.

*Poldark*'s Eleanor Tomlinson (*fourth from left*) is among the cast of *The Forsytes*

### Death By Lightning

**Netflix**
**Thursday 6 November**

Netflix's latest period drama tells the story of the 20th US president. Played by Michael Shannon, James Garfield was inaugurated in 1881 when, as the show's creator Mike Makowsky says, the country was "standing at a crossroads between the past and the future". He tried to clean up political corruption, but just months later was assassinated by his one-time admirer Charles Guiteau (Matthew Macfadyen).

### The Last Burma Star

**Sky History and Sky History Play**
**Sunday 9 November**

In this documentary explorer Levison Wood and historian Alex Bescoby remember the brutal Burma Campaign in the jungles of Asia during the Second World War. There's a family link too, as Wood's grandfather fought in Burma (now Myanmar). Together they visit battlefields, and uncover a 100-year-old veteran, still living in Myanmar, who never received his Burma Star medal. Against the odds, they set out to deliver it.

BBC/HILLGATE FILMS AND VOLTAGE TV I MAMMOTH SCREEN LTD/5 BROADCASTING LTD

# NEXT MONTH

Our Christmas issue goes on sale on **2 December**

## ALAS SMITH & JONES

How to research common names without going down the wrong path

**IDENTIFYING THE FALLEN**

How the MOD War Detectives uncover the truth

**PLUS**

Salvation Army Records

Merseyside Resources

Orphanages And Children's Homes

**Your essential buyer's guide to DNA tests**

GETTY IMAGES

# 'Kitty Was The Mother-In-Law From Hell'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Jo Chinn is fascinated by her great grandmother, a redoubtable Victorian determined to protect her sons from tragedy and suffering. By **Gail Dixon**

Jo's formidable forebear Catherine 'Kitty' Cornelius, née Woodhouse

Novelist Jo Chinn has been a genealogy addict since 2021 when her sister Denise gave her a box of family photographs. "This treasure trove also contained birth, marriage and death certificates," Jo explains, "and a large red folder of family research that Great Uncle Raymond had collated in the 1960s.

"Denise asked me to 'do something with it', so I joined Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and a new obsession was born. My tree now goes back to 1495."

Jo's favourite ancestor is her great grandmother Catherine (Kitty) Christina Woodhouse, who was born in Dublin in 1885.

"Kitty was the youngest of eight children ranging in age from 21 downwards and her parents were John and Mary Woodhouse, or so she thought."

Both John and Mary died of tuberculosis before Kitty was three, and she was raised in a Dublin orphanage with her sister Lizzy; the institution was run by an order of nuns named the Daughters of Charity. Tragedy struck a few years later when her brother William died of tuberculosis aged 30.

"Kitty discovered that William was actually her father. She had been abandoned as a baby on the family doorstep by her mother, whose identity remains unknown, and John and Mary tacked her onto their brood.

"So, her siblings were actually her aunts and uncles, and her parents were her grandparents. This was proved by her marriage certificate, which I found in the box Denise gave me."

In around 1906, Kitty moved to England and went into service. There she met and married Henry Michael Cornelius (known as Harry), who worked for a retired governor of Burma (now Myanmar) as a butler. The ceremony was held in 1908 at the magnificent Roman Catholic Brompton Oratory in London. Kitty was already pregnant.

"My sister and I visited the oratory last year to examine the actual marriage record. It was a very emotional moment."

Kitty and Harry left service and set up a guesthouse in Denmark Hill, Southwark, London.

"Their first son, my grandfather William H Cornelius, was born in 1909 partially deaf.

"Kitty lost two babies in harrowing circumstances, first Leslie who died aged nine months of pneumonia and heart failure in 1913, then Gladys who died aged six months on Christmas Day 1916, also of pneumonia. I can't imagine how awful it must have been for Kitty and Harry to suffer such loss. Gladys' memoriam card was in the family box."

A death record revealed that Kitty's unmarried sister Lizzy, who worked as a children's nurse, died in Kitty's home aged 46 in 1928, as a result of liver atrophy and cholelithiasis (gallstones).

Kitty had two other sons, Reginald and Raymond, who survived into adulthood.

"She controlled her sons with a rod of iron, and refused to let them leave the family home to marry. My grandfather William and Great Uncle Reginald both broke away and found wives.

"According to a handwritten witness account by Reg's wife Win, Kitty was horrible to her daughters-in-law and fell out with her husband's family. She refused to attend Reg's and Win's wedding because she wasn't a Roman Catholic."

Jo can understand why she would turn into a termagant. "Kitty's life was dominated by the deaths of loved ones, and perhaps she 'protected' her children by controlling them. That could explain why she was awful to her daughters-in-law because they 'took away' her surviving sons."

Jo's passion for genealogy has inspired her first novel *Under the Hickory Tree*, a story of family secrets, betrayal and redemption that was published by The Book Guild in June this year.

"Kitty is such an inspiring character that she will be the protagonist of my next novel. Its working title is *The Queen of Denmark Hill*," she reveals.

**Kitty was horrible to her daughters-in-law and fell out with her husband's family**

**JO CHINN** lives in the New Forest, Hampshire, and is a retired police superintendent who now works as a novelist

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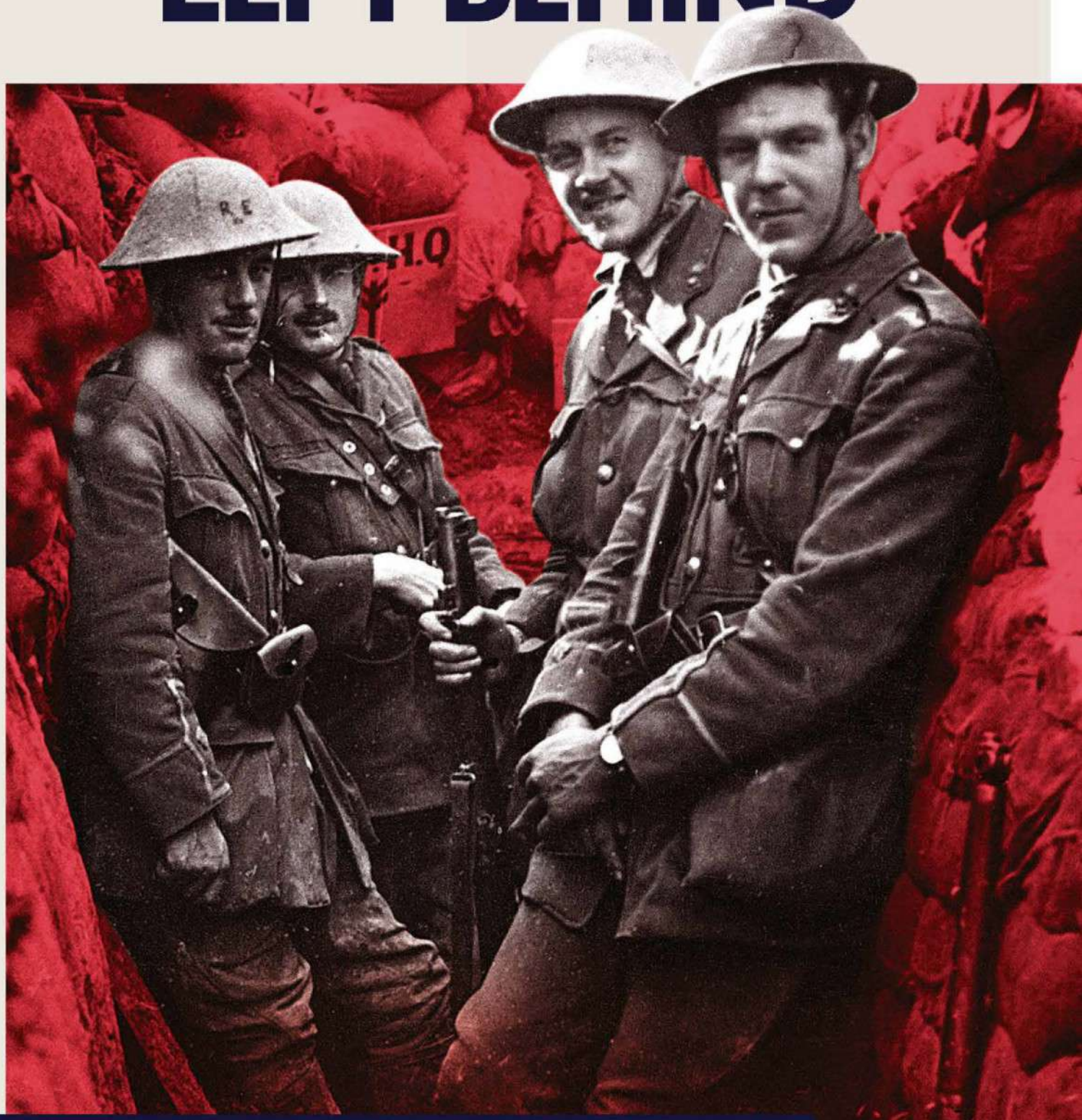
# NO STORY LEFT BEHIND



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